

Foreword 2013

The 1963 boycott against the Bristol Omnibus Company was the first black-led campaign against racial discrimination in post-war Britain. When I first heard about it in the early 1980s I was astonished that no one had seen fit to document it. Concerned that the experiences of those involved would soon be lost to posterity, I decided to interview a range of people whose lives had been touched by the events of 1963 in order to “bear witness to the experience of both black and white Bristolians” and establish a narrative which incorporated their testimonies and also the little that was available from newspaper accounts and other archival sources.

People today are fascinated and some are surprised by the fact that racial discrimination was open and legal in Britain in the 1960s. Yet this was not an especially popular investigation to undertake during the Thatcher years because the story of Bristol’s colour bar raised uncomfortable issues which cut across traditional political divisions. The early 1980s were not only a time when emerging racial extremism informed the public debate around immigration but also one when the trade union movement was itself under attack. What made things especially awkward was the fact that two Bristol branches of the Transport and General Workers Union had passed resolutions in the mid-1950s against employing black bus drivers and conductors. These resolutions were still in force in 1963 and had never been formally challenged by the union’s Regional Office, despite the rhetoric of international worker solidarity and social equality traditionally adopted by the trade union movement.

When I first broached this subject with trade union officials at both national and regional level, there was a reluctance to discuss the possibility that racist ideals might have influenced the trade union members, lest it render the movement more vulnerable to political attack. Though mindful of this danger, it struck me as all the more important to explore these issues with as much honesty and understanding as possible.

Nor had much been recorded about the experiences of first generation new Commonwealth immigrants. Black British history writing was in its infancy in the early 1980s and as a result British-born children knew next to nothing about the strategies and struggles their parents and

grandparents had adopted to survive in the UK. I wanted to know more too about what inspired and sustained those who, at a time when racial discrimination was perfectly legal, decided to challenge the status quo. The intention was not to provide an uncritical celebratory history of black activism, but a fair-minded one in which black people were portrayed not as passive victims but as active individuals variously negotiating a difficult and challenging terrain.

Establishing a narrative about the local leaders of the Bristol bus boycott, namely Paul Stephenson, Roy Hackett, Owen Henry and Guy Bailey, had both the effect of ensuring their achievements were not left out of the historical record and the added if unintended bonus of providing a platform for future research and community history projects. Acknowledging too the support proffered by Sir Learie Constantine, Tony Benn, Harold Wilson, Anthony Lester and Julia Lester as well as local white activists threw new light on how existing social networks affected political campaigns around race.

The account thus produced was written outside the academy and had no institutional support from any academic institution, despite the fact that I was then working full time as a history lecturer at what was then Bristol Polytechnic (now the University of the West of England). The advantage of this was that I had no constraints on what or how I wrote (though I was careful to supply references for all my assertions); the disadvantage was that I did not have the time and resources to locate all the people I would have ideally liked to have interviewed, or to pursue all the avenues of enquiry which suggested themselves during my investigations.

Originally published by the workers-writers cooperative "Bristol Broadsides", of which I was a founding member, the narrative has since taken on an unexpected life of its own. In 1989 a shortened version was published as part of a three-volume collection of essays on English patriotism (*Patriotism and the Making of an English National Identity*, volume 1, Raphael Samuel, ed [London: Routledge, 1989]). In 2007 it was re-published by Bristol City Council as part of their Abolition 200 campaign and an on-line version was more recently made available by the Victoria Counties History Project at the University of London: <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/items/black-and-white-buses>

The narrative thus established was also disseminated in other public formats. In 2003 it formed the basis of a Radio 4 documentary produced by Jolyon Jenkins, and has been featured in a number of community

projects and films, BBC on-line accounts and commemorative events. Perhaps most significantly, it formed the basis for the portrayal of the bus boycott campaign in Bristol's new M Shed Museum as part of a theme around political resistance in the city.

Fifty years on, the story still inspires public interest and I am grateful to Martin Upchurch, Professor of International Employment Relations at Middlesex University, who initiated and energetically oversaw the production of this present edition, enlisting the support of a number of trade unions to do so. I would like to thank in particular the branches of Bristol National Union of Journalists, Bristol City Council Unison, Bristol Trades Union Council, UWE Unison, Bristol Unite Health, Bristol RMT, Bristol Unite Finance and Legal, Bristol National Union of Teachers, Bristol Unite General Services as well as Bristol Unite Against Fascism for their generosity in all senses of the word.

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Introduction | 1986

“If you would know your history, then you would know where you’re coming from.” (Bob Marley)

This pamphlet may stir up controversy, but that was not its original intention. My aim was to write history, to bear witness to the experience of both black and white Bristolians.

No history is purely objective, for there is always the selection of facts, and facts are themselves the product of interpretation. But I have tried to be fair and to respect the historical evidence available to me.

I hope that my pamphlet will be a useful resource to the black youth of Britain in their exploration of their own past. I hope it conveys to them some sense of what their parents and grandparents went through on their arrival in this country. The modest concessions they gained were won by courage and persistence. Their stories are worth retelling.

It is worth recording too that the motives of those whites who supported the bus boycott cannot be explained away, as some would like to do, as meddling do-gooding or cynical politicking. People who can see beyond their own immediate self-interest and comfort are rare, and this pamphlet is a testament to all those, black, brown and white, who swam against a tide of complacency and intolerance.

Finally, it is my fervent hope that this article is not dismissed as a union-bashing piece. True, it does expose the racism and insensitivity which existed among some of the rank and file bus crews. But it also shows how much such attitudes were grounded in fears about economic security at a time of great social and cultural change.

The spirit of solidarity among the crews is in many ways inspiring and I am grateful for the hospitality and honesty of those busmen and women I interviewed.

The regional and national leaderships of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) are now evolving their own policies against racism. I hope this pamphlet will be of use to them as part of that process.

Madge Dresser
October 1986

Black and White on the Buses

The 1963 Colour Bar Dispute in Bristol

Few people today remember much about the campaign against the colour bar on Bristol's buses. Yet in 1963, when Black Americans were beginning their long campaign for civil rights, and when the screws of the apartheid system were being turned ever more tightly in South Africa, a small but highly charged drama was also unfolding in Bristol, England, over racial discrimination.

It is a story which involves black and white Bristolians of all classes and most opinions. On 30 April 1963 local West Indian activists publicly exposed Bristol Omnibus Company's long standing colour bar against black bus crews. The bar was perfectly legal, for although an Immigration Act had been passed the year before, no law yet existed against racial segregation or discrimination. But the time was ripe for change. When the Bus Company's General Manager, Ian Patey, defended the bar, black activists declared a bus boycott, university students marched in protest, and angry white bus crews heckled the West Indians' spokesman, Paul Stephenson.

The local press had a field day, television crews moved in, and soon the national press featured the dispute. By the time the row was settled, four months later, an array of big names had entered the fray. Politicians like Harold Wilson, Tony Benn, and Fenner Brockway and eminent sportsmen like Sir Learie Constantine, by then a high-ranking diplomat, all made their presence felt. Ron Nethercott, the Regional Secretary for the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), clashed with Stephenson who later successfully sued him for libel in the High Court. The Bishop of Bristol and other churchmen pleaded for reconciliation and the *Bristol Evening Post* had its biggest postbag for decades. Secret negotiations between the busmen's union and the bus company ensued. By the end of August the colour bar was declared officially dead. By mid-September a Sikh college graduate by the name of Raghbir Singh became Bristol's first "coloured" bus conductor.

These are the bare bones of the story. The questions they raise are much meatier. Was, for example, the colour bar a "bosses' plot" or the will of the workers? Was Paul Stephenson an unrepresentative troublemaker

or a "tribune of the people"? And just how dead was the colour bar after it had been formally interred?

This account of the Bristol colour bar dispute has been constructed from press reports, council records, and interviews with many of the people involved.¹ But it would be disingenuous to claim that I have let the people "speak for themselves". For some people, like Mr Wally Jenkins who led Bristol's Labour Group on the City Council in the early 1960s, and Mr Bill Smith, then the Chairman of Bristol's West Indian Association, have refused to be interviewed. By the same token, written records were rather hard to obtain. The Bristol Omnibus Company insists that all its records are automatically destroyed after five years. The regional officials of the TGWU, who kindly granted me interviews, could not find their written records for this period. The records of the Bishop of Bristol's Social and Industrial Mission were lost in a recent move. And the City Archives are curiously incomplete for 1963, the year of the dispute.

Still, there is enough material to piece together a preliminary account of this most intriguing episode of Bristol's recent history.

Three people who had long known about the colour bar on the Bristol buses were Roy Hackett, Owen Henry and Peter Carty. They were all young men in their twenties when they came to Bristol around 1957. Like the thousand other West Indians then living in the city, these sons of poor Jamaican cultivators came in search of a more prosperous life.

Owen Henry worked in a succession of labouring jobs beginning at Avonmouth Flour Mills before opening up a small shipping and travel firm in St Paul's in 1967. Like Hackett and Carty he found low paid jobs easier to come by than housing.

"Things was very rough during those days for us, living accommodation we couldn't really find easily... There were a few white people...who'd been prepared to take us in as lodgers. But this means losing their next-door neighbours' friendship".²

Carty too, recalls: "Yes it was bad when we just come here because, true, we couldn't get anywhere from the white people to rent".³

All three men found lodgings in or near City Road, St Paul's. This area was running down before black immigration became significant. Bristol's planners noted the exodus of better-off whites throughout the early 1950s. The large houses being vacated were going cheap and were ripe for multi-occupation. Black people settled in the area, a few buying, most renting, precisely because they couldn't find or afford accommodation in the more desirable parts of the city.⁴



Left to right: Audley Evans, Paul Stephenson and Owen Henry discuss the campaign. *Evening Post* 30.4.63

As they came into St Paul's, the immigrants were blamed by some for the deteriorating conditions they encountered.

According to one source: "The sort of thing that was being said in the papers [was that] the ones who were arriving first were buying big houses and exploiting new arrivals by letting them at exorbitant rents and this was good for a lot of criticism in the town!"⁵

Those new arrivals who'd actually lived through the experience seem to have been grateful to anyone, black or white, who would give them a roof, however leaky, over their head. Owen Henry remembers his first Bristol digs:

"There were a few Asians and they pooled together and we managed to rent from them. I was into a lodgings. In one room there was six of us...the [white] landlady was a very nice lady. She was very helpful. The furniture wasn't much good. The linens weren't much good. I mean I was there a fortnight and I had to buy my own bed linen because they weren't changing them regularly enough. But I was glad to be there because the rest of the fellows living in that room [Irish, West Indian and Africans] were quite friendly".⁶

Friendliness was a precious commodity when people like Owen Henry felt unsafe alone on the streets at night:

"We couldn't walk the streets on our own... 'cause of the Teddy Boys and at night, I should say, they would always gang up on us. So every times we go out we have to go out in a file of six or so".⁷

Peter Carty was also "glad" to be staying in a friend of a friend's house when he first arrived.

"Well, his room was a bit small so I decided to look for one myself. I went to several white people's home but they refused to rent me a room... And the only person who will take us in their home is the Polish and we were welcomed by them..."⁸

Despite the exploitation that must have occurred one can see the logic behind Carty's argument that:

"If a black man have a room or a home then he'll try to help all the rest of the blacks to put them in and then when the white people see so many of us living in one home they started to grumble about it and yet they have a place and refuse to rent it!"⁹

Roy Hackett too found himself in the City Road area even though it meant he had to get up at 4am to get to his job at Hinkley Point Atomic Power station by eight.¹⁰

Yet from the vantage point of many white working class Bristolians the plight of the West Indians could arouse resentment rather than sympathy. "John Garrett" (not his real name), a busman and minor union official in the mid-1950s, felt he was hard pressed enough supporting his family without having to help those he saw as uninvited strangers.

"...they were bringing shipments of these people over from, you know, from wherever it was. And it wasn't a question of families at that time, it was individuals in the main that were coming and there was a question of where they were going to stay... At the same time as this was going on, there was a chappie who was [assistant to the] industrial adviser to the Bishop of Bristol, and his name was Andrew Hake... And he paid a visit to Cliff Price [another union official] and me...and he was talking then...[about] providing accommodation for the coloured people and uh I mean I had four children by the ways, four boys then living at home [in a three bedroom house]... So he was on, you know, about brotherly love and all this kind of business and he thought that we ought to put ourselves out, you know, and during the conversation I asked him where he lived and he was living in a big house on the Downs so I said, 'Is it a big house?' and he said, 'Yeah.' So then I said, 'Well, how many darkies have you got living there?' So end of conversation!" [Laughs]"

John Garrett's hostility may have been grounded in class resentment but there was more to it than that. To Garrett, "these people" that "they"

were bringing over were, after all, “darkies”. His choice of words confirms what he himself readily admits: “Now at this time we were talking colour bar, let’s be honest.”

It would be unfair to forget that there were white Bristolians, especially from the St Paul’s area, who did extend a welcome to the West Indians. Their personal acts of kindness should not go unrecorded. It would be difficult to prove, but there was a consensus among the early Jamaican settlers that were it not for the kindness and companionship of some white women, life would have been even more difficult than it was. Some of these women, particularly those who later got caught up in the area’s criminal subculture, received poor recompense for their kindness. Others were treated with love and respect. The word sexism had not yet been invented in the early 1960s, but like racism, it too existed and must be acknowledged.¹²

What should be acknowledged too was the objection at “gut level” that some Bristolians held about English women going out with West Indian men on any terms.¹³ Owen Henry remembers that he and his friends were banned from a dance hall they rented allegedly for “dancing with their hats on”. The real reason for their being banned was that they were dancing with white women. Another Jamaican man, who came to Bristol in the late 1950s, observed:

“They [white people] see these West Indian chaps going out with white girls and they have the impression that all of them were using them [the women] for prostitution, to live off their immoral earnings, when in... most cases it was not so”.¹⁴

By 1958 the number of West Indian residents had begun to include the wives, family and friends of the first arrivals. There were perhaps 1,500 West Indians now in Bristol, still less than 1 percent of the city’s population.¹⁵

Yet despite their small numbers, unemployment began to become a problem. It may seem strange in the 1980s that an unemployment rate of 2.2 percent could excite such anxiety, but it did. As early as 1958, an earnest young researcher, Jessie Hood, reported to the Committee for the Welfare of Colonial Workers (a committee sponsored by the Lord Mayor and the Bishop of Bristol) that:

“Fear of increasing unemployment has made many English people more conscious of the presence of coloured people. Many white people who had a ‘live and let live’ attitude to coloured people two years ago [in 1956] are now asking why coloured people should be allowed to come into

this country and are showing hostility when speaking about coloured people, although not necessarily when speaking to coloured people".¹⁶

The Teddy Boy violence which Owen Henry had encountered in the earlier days had by 1958 erupted far more seriously in the Notting Hill and Nottingham race riots.¹⁷ In Bristol, West Indians had begun to clash with the Teddy Boys. One Jamaican man remembers feeling fed up that:

"[You] can't go out on the street, can't see your wife go out with worry that she'd be attacked by Teddy Boys... In the pub down here...it used to be called the Britannia, now they call it Inkerman, we couldn't go down there to have a drink—it would be a blood bath! We had to stand up to those type of things...as soon as there were more of us [in Bristol] we had to stand up to them, there was no question about that... Ashley Road [the top end], the Hatchet, all those places were places where you must have a fight if you go down there. Southmead, one black person couldn't go to Southmead in the pub".¹⁸

The sources of tension in Bristol were the same as those cited in Notting Hill and Nottingham: competition for employment, sexual jealousy and housing shortages. But fights aside, there were no riots, more a silent closing of white ranks, as this following report suggests:

"There are indications that more employers in Bristol are definitely saying 'no coloured workers' and those who already employ coloured people are often unwilling to engage others, even to replace a coloured employee".¹⁹

From her own small survey based on grass roots welfare advice work with immigrants, Jesse Hood concluded that both men and women from the Caribbean were finding it harder to get jobs. Factory work was becoming scarcer and even building work was becoming more casualised.

"New arrivals are taking much longer to find work; some have been in Bristol for months without finding jobs. There are a few West Indians known to me that have had only a few weeks employment in the year... These people still walk around Bristol daily looking for work."

Even on the basis of official figures which underestimated joblessness, especially among married women, black unemployment in Bristol in 1958 was roughly 5 percent, over

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twice the rate suffered by whites. Morale among West Indians, said Hood, was “surprisingly high”. But the seeds of discontent and bitterness were being sown.

By 1960, about half of Bristol’s 3,000-strong West Indian population were crowded into a few streets in St Paul’s.²⁰ City Road was the first stop of the poor rural migrant, just as St Jude’s had been in Bristol some 60 years before. Only now the rural poor came from further afield than Somerset, Wales or Ireland.²¹ The world was shrinking and the empire was coming back home to roost.

The City Road area with its decaying and overcrowded tenements had grown notorious by the early 1960s. Its small but highly visible contingent of hustlers and pimps affected the way many Bristolians perceived all West Indians. Although the majority of her residents were white, St Paul’s became the “coloured area”, “coloured” meant City Road, and “City Road” conjured up fears and fantasies of violence, immorality and lawlessness. In the highhanded language of the city’s Welfare Department: “It is very easy for non-thinking members of the public to bracket all immigrants together and regard them as ‘no good’.”²²

To the West Indians trying to survive there, City Road may have been a “Shanty Town” but at least it was friendly. Some who could afford it bought their own homes and moved out of the area altogether. But those who did found that its lurid image followed them. For a start, property values threatened to plummet when black families moved into a street. It wasn’t just the brightly coloured brickwork or the reported penchant for “playing jazz records extremely loud”, which could make house prices fall. It was a fear of low standards—as much moral as economic, which had little to do with the actual standards of the actual individuals moving in. Roy Hackett recalls the time when he and his new wife Ena were:

“living in a particular road where there were two black families...in Royate Hill...my first house... And I was told afterward by my [white] neighbours [about] you know, the leg pulling they get at work, about black neighbours and so on, and, you know, ‘Have you got a daughter?’ and all that sort of thing. Fair enough, people can say what they wanted to say. [But it is] the thing that I do that is really either no good or good. And I tried myself to be a good neighbour!”²³

Other West Indians, even those who like Owen Henry bought their own homes, preferred to stay in the City Road St Paul’s area. This was to the despair of some city housing officials who wanted to “disperse” the black population rather like one disperses a dark stain.²⁴ Even the more

sympathetic officials from the Public Health Department seemingly failed to appreciate that the “ghetto”, such as it was, seemed to some like a haven in a heartless world. As Lissett Simpson, a “housewife”, told a local reporter in 1961: “We would not be happy away from here. There is still so much prejudice that we prefer to stay together”.²⁵

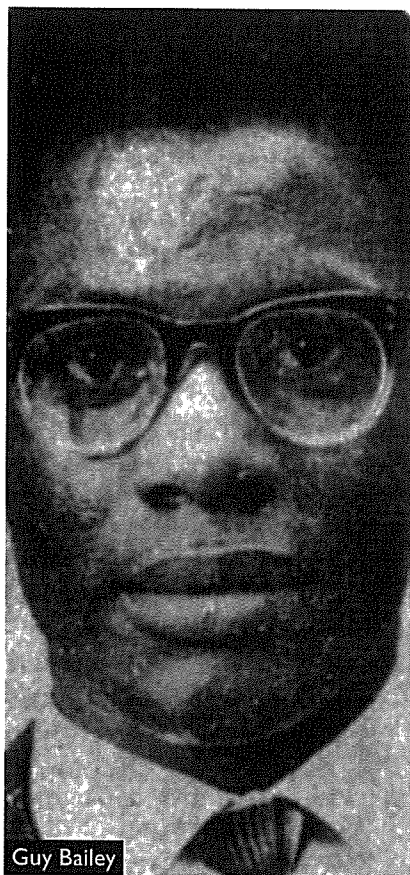
As the Afro-Caribbean community expanded, it generated more social and religious groups. Most of these were of an informal nature. Repulsed by local white churches, most West Indians retreated to the black-led Pentecostal church or met in each other’s homes.²⁶ There was no one organisation representing immigrant interests, there was only the “Colonial Association”, which had been set up for West Indian ex-servicemen and their English wives in the early 1950s.²⁷ But Owen Henry remembers helping to transform this group into the West Indian Association. This association could never recruit the mass of West Indians in Bristol but it was the nearest thing the community had to a representative group. By 1962, the year of Jamaican independence, ex-RAF man Bill Smith was chairman.

Bill Smith worked in the same firm as Wally Jenkins, councillor for St Paul’s and the leader of Bristol Council’s Labour opposition. Smith thus became an informal link man with the City Council. Henry and Hackett tried to raise issues of discrimination in employment and housing through Smith.²⁸ They also met on several occasions with councillors and officials themselves, but felt they were getting “promises, promises” but not much else.

One of the areas of discrimination that rankled most was the colour bar on the buses. Union officials might later deny there was one, or plead ignorance about its existence. But in the late 1950s the colour bar’s existence was virtually common knowledge in some circles. Yet no one on the council or in the local leadership of the Transport and General Workers’ Union seems to have moved a finger to get it lifted. In fact, it seems, the bus company initiated the ban after a union ballot of workers in 1955.²⁹

The Passenger Group of the TGWU in Bristol reportedly passed a resolution in January of that year that coloured workers should not be employed as bus crews.³⁰ The maintenance section, however, voted the other way,³¹ and black people were soon taken on in the garages. Andrew Hake, then an enthusiastic curate attached to the Bishop of Bristol’s Industrial Mission, remembers that:

“The TGWU in the city had said that if one black man steps on the platform as a conductor, every wheel will stop. This seemed absolutely



Guy Bailey

wrong...what we would now call racism. I'm not sure that that word was used much in those days..."³²

Hake confronted a member of the management of Bristol Omnibus Company on this issue sometime in 1956 or 1957. The management, he recalls, told him they had:

"no objection to employing black people...but [that] the unions had made their position clear and the management were not prepared to face a showdown, a confrontation which would have led to strike action. And so they were biding their time and waiting for this to change".³³

Was the management such an unwilling accomplice to the bar? And what was behind the union's position? These are questions we shall come to later. For now it is enough to establish that a colour bar was passed, similar to a ban passed by Coventry busmen that

same year, and was known about by union members. The only two categories of union members who opposed this ban were, in the words of Hake, either "Christians or Communists". No one else seemed to care and even these elements were too poorly organised to take action.

By the early 1960s one local Labour activist, then a Bristol Trades Council member, confirmed that:

"It was taken for granted in the movement that the TGWU was operating a veto...one could not help but notice there wasn't a single coloured face [on the buses]...apart from some we never saw who might have been washing down the things at night".³⁴

Hackett and Henry too had seen black people working on the buses in London, Wolverhampton and Manchester. Owen Henry reasoned that although "there was no black crews in any of the [Bristol] buses...there

was quite enough black people that were using the buses...enough to pay a black person's wages and this wasn't being done."

Indeed Peter Carty remembers a number of friends who tried for a job on the buses who had been rebuffed by the Bristol Omnibus Company: "and they are capable people, they are people capable enough to do bus driving and conducting. And they went there and they refused to give them a job."

Allegations that such a colour bar existed were made public in a series of exposé articles in the *Bristol Evening Post* in 1961.³⁵ One of the articles in the series, written by Roger Bennett, aired the bitterness of three City Road residents, Fianzo Clarke, Henry Patrick and Patrick Shillingford, about:

"what they called unnecessary insults to their race—particularly the Bristol Omnibus Company's failure to employ coloured labour. 'We only ride on the buses if it is very cold or it pours with rain,' said Mr Clarke".³⁶

Another article in the series, by Malcolm Smith, was more hard hitting. He revealed there was "a flat refusal by the undermanned Bristol Omnibus Company to employ coloured people in their crews, however high their skill".³⁷

The company reportedly blamed prejudice among the workers as the reason for the lack of black personnel. But the article made no mention of any deal with the unions. Indeed, Ron Nethercott, the TGWU's regional secretary, adamantly denied any decision to ban West Indians had been made: "There is no colour bar. We have a lot of coloured members in Bristol, most of them on the labouring side".³⁸

Strictly speaking, Nethercott was right. The TGWU as a whole did not operate a colour bar. Indeed, the Quaker-owned Fry's chocolate factory employed several hundred black workers who were bona fide members of Nethercott's union. But what Nethercott omitted to explain was that the TGWU had not opposed their Passenger Division from passing a colour bar on the buses!

The bus company's General Manager, Ian Patey, was a bit more forthcoming. A few West Indians, he reportedly explained, "were employed in the garage but this was labouring work in which capacity most employers were prepared to accept them".³⁹

Malcolm Smith's article concluded that a formal colour bar probably did exist on the buses, despite the denials of both union and management.

Sometime in 1962 Ena Hackett, Roy Hackett's wife, applied for a job as bus conductress and was turned down, despite the reported labour shortage on the buses:

“...it always been in the newspaper, the *Evening Post*, that, ‘we cannot run the buses because we haven’t got any staff.’ And at the time my wife had applied for a job on the buses. Unfortunately, it was always, ‘No, we can’t have you.’ Then there was no law against discrimination”.⁴⁰

Hackett goes on to explain what happened next:

“Owen Henry and I who were good friends at the time talked about it and said, ‘What can we do about it?’ And then we ask [Audley] Evans [another Jamaican] to join us... We think, ‘Well, it’s about time to put pressure on Bristol City Council...’ We thought, ‘Should we talk to them? Yes!’ We...sent delegation to the Bristol City Council telling them of our plight...before the [1963] crisis, through Bill Smith... And we never get anywhere and we thought it’s about time for action”.⁴¹

The ginger group that grew out of the younger men’s dissatisfaction was later to be called the West Indian Development Council. It was to be more political than the West Indian Association, which saw itself more as a cultural and social group. The group consisted at first of Henry, Hackett, Audley Evans and another Jamaican, Prince Brown. It was at this point, in 1962, that Henry met a young newcomer to Bristol, by the name of Paul Stephenson.

Stephenson was not West Indian. His father was West African and his mother came from a long established British family. His maternal grandmother Edie Johnson had, for example, been a well-known West End actress in the 1920s. Stephenson himself was born in England and was evacuated in 1940 at the age of two to live in an (all white) Essex village. After a stint with the RAF in West Germany during national service, Stephenson bought himself out and did a community work course at West Hill College in Birmingham. In 1962 he had just arrived in Bristol as the city’s first black youth officer. Like Jesse Hood, his job was financed by an external grant.⁴²

Stephenson was sent to work with West Indian youth in St Paul’s. This was quite a change from his former experience. Henry introduced him to the small group who formed the embryonic core of the West Indian Development Council. The group already existed informally before Stephenson arrived on the scene, but it was he who stimulated it into effective life. Owen Henry recalls:

“Paul and I met at a dance hall, Jamaican Independence or something. We got talking and we seemed to realise that we had similar intentions as such and so we started meeting. And he was [introduced] to the Development Council and so we meet on Sunday mornings... And we

discussed quite a number of things and we decided that if and when we make a move we must only have one spokesman, and it was decided that Paul would be the spokesman."

Stephenson must have seemed a good choice. He was educated, articulate, and probably more confident in his dealings with whites than were his working class Jamaican-born colleagues. Very much inspired by the example of Martin Luther King Jr, whose activism and eloquence were then making world headlines, he saw the bus issue as typifying the particularly reactionary racial attitudes held by Bristol's white establishment.

"This was an issue that would bring out racism. I wasn't aware of the depths—it seemed so illogical to me that in London where people were being recruited on the buses, and indeed where London Transport were going recruiting in Barbados, that Bristol should have had a policy of having no black people working on the buses... I didn't for a minute think I was going to get much opposition. Oh no, I thought, once it's out, people will say, 'This is ridiculous'."⁴³

The first thing to do was to establish once and for all that the Bristol Omnibus Company was operating a colour bar. This was relatively easy. Stephenson had an 18 year old student at one of the night school classes he organised who would act as a test case. Guy Bailey, the young man in question, was of impeccable character. He was a Boy's Brigade Officer, cricket club member, a full-time warehouseman and part-time student.⁴⁴ Stephenson duly fixed up an interview with the bus company after establishing that there were vacancies for someone of Bailey's qualifications. He then phoned back to tell them Bailey was West Indian, and the interview was promptly cancelled. Stephenson went to see the Company's General Manager, Ian Patey, who affirmed that the company did indeed ban the employment of "coloured labour" on the buses. As Stephenson reminds us, this was then perfectly within Patey's right: "People tend to forget there were no laws against racism".⁴⁵

The problem was where to take it from there. Stephenson remembers walking on the Downs racking his brains for a bright idea. All of a sudden, he remembers, the idea of a bus boycott came to him "like an inspiration":

"I believe that there was something that God probably, you know, was saying something

'People
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to me...I...didn't quite know what, but yet, I felt I had to do it. And I never ever throughout [the campaign] doubted that I'd win."

Owen Henry remembers the announcement of their boycott plans in more prosaic terms. It was:

"...when Muhammad Ali fight Liston for the first time... And we had a conference in Paul's flat and we... [saw the press] at what was then the Triangle in Clifton. And I boarded the bus there and stayed at the back... especially for the photographers to take a photograph of a black person at the back of the bus."

"The back of the bus" was where black Americans were forced to sit in many Southern towns in the 1960s. It was one of the issues Martin Luther King Jr was fighting—by way of a bus boycott. But for Owen Henry in Bristol, "the back of the bus" was where bus conductors stood. For him, it was a symbolic defiance of racial segregation, Bristol style.

The press conference and boycott were part of a wider strategy. Stephenson lobbied MPs Stan Awbery and Tony Benn for support in the hopes of getting the issue of discrimination raised in parliament. The Development Council also hoped to call in the assistance of the West Indian National Association to which the West Indian Association was affiliated. They also hoped to picket St Mary Redcliffe Church on the Sunday following their press conference, and had vaguer more grandiose plans of a mass demonstration of West Indian bus crews from around the country.⁴⁶

Bill Smith must have been concerned that his years of building up links with the City Council would be jeopardised by such bold and confrontational action. Hackett felt that Bill Smith had his hands tied by wanting to retain the goodwill of the council:

"We thought a younger person like Paul Stephenson and ourself could force their hand much quicker. Okay, I'm not saying Bill would not have got through but it might have taken two or three years. The way we did it we thought, 'It's now or never'. And we're glad it was 'now'... We just wanted the godfathers—the City Fathers—[to] know it's about time. Well, maybe I wasn't in Bristol long enough, but from '57 to '63 was a long time for me, anyhow".⁴⁷

What Hackett and, presumably, Smith did not know was that the "City Fathers" who jointly administered overall bus policy with Bristol Omnibus, had already officially complied with the colour bar.

In February 1962 a question raised by one Mr Langham in a council meeting was on the employment of "coloured labour" on the buses.⁴⁸ His

question must have been referred to committee. For soon afterwards the Town Clerk invited Ian Patey to attend a mid-March session of the Joint Transport Committee. There the company's general manager justified the bar. Patey told those present that he had had "factual evidence" that the introduction of coloured crews in other cities downgraded the job and caused existing (white) staff to go elsewhere.⁴⁹ Committee member Mr Gailey, a bus company official, "explained" to the meeting that "there was now an improved employment level in the West Indies and the better type of coloured labour similar to those working on the London Underground was not now available".⁵⁰

Wasn't Guy Bailey a "better type" of worker? And what of those pre-1963 immigrants? Had they all been snapped up by London Transport? And didn't Gailey's argument contradict the thrust of Patey's contention about the destructive effects employing black labour had?

Such inconsistencies did not apparently trouble the Joint Transport Committee with its three Aldermen, two City Councillors and five bus company men. They decided after some discussion not to oppose Patey's colour bar: "Views were expressed by several members of the Committee and in making reference to Mr Patey's statement and appreciating the difficulties in this matter, it was not advocated that there should be any change in the existing employment policy".⁵¹

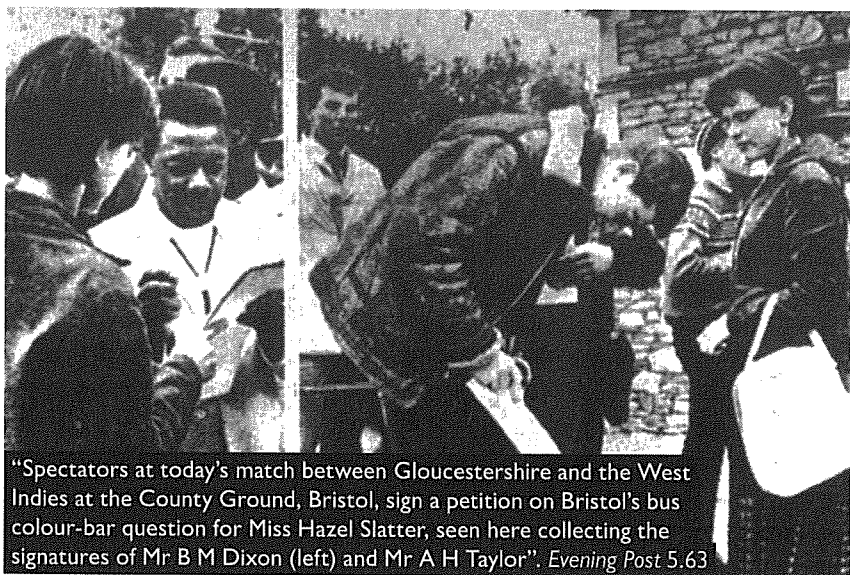
Could this be why Bill Smith's "softly softly" approach had produced no results?

The announcement of the boycott in 1963 caught the attention of the *Western Daily Press* and the *Bristol Evening Post*. Bus boycotts may have been appropriate to King's campaign in Montgomery, Alabama, but surely, the papers implied, there was no cause for such action in Bristol! Yet when reporters questioned Patey they were treated to a vigorous defence of his racist employment policy. It was pretty much the same one he presented so convincingly to City Councillors and Aldermen a year before.

"Mr Ian Patey...said today the company's policy regarding coloured labour had been clear for years and the action by the West Indians would not make them reconsider their policy:

'We don't employ a mixed labour force as bus crews because we have found from observing other bus companies that the labour supply gets worse if the labour force is mixed'.⁵²

An *Evening Post* editorial pointed out that to justify a colour bar because of the prejudice coloured labour would arouse had "an unhappy



"Spectators at today's match between Gloucestershire and the West Indies at the County Ground, Bristol, sign a petition on Bristol's bus colour-bar question for Miss Hazel Slatter, seen here collecting the signatures of Mr B M Dixon (left) and Mr A H Taylor". *Evening Post* 5.63

ring of convenience". But the *Post* was quick to turn on the busmen's union and asked:

"What are trade union leaders doing to get the race virus out of the systems of their ranks and file... The union have had plenty to say about South Africa. They should take a look nearer home".⁵³

Transport and General Workers' Union officials did not take kindly to being pilloried in public. They resented Stephenson's approaching them after the boycott was announced. They consequently closed ranks and refused to meet a deputation from the West Indian Development Council. Arthur Coxwell of the TGWU had reportedly made it clear in a letter to Stephenson that, "The union had no colour bar and that the decision not to employ West Indians had been made by the bus company alone".⁵⁴

"I told him that the union had stated their view on this question so often that there was little point in stating it again'... This was the only reason why he told Mr Stephenson there was no point in an interview".⁵⁵

Jack Hodge, who was then chairman of the union branch of the Bristol City Busmen, maintained that:

"It wasn't until we read the evening press that we found that Guy Bailey made the approach [and had] been rejected 'cause he was coloured. And then Paul Stephenson [was] coming on the scene... We didn't know much about Paul as busmen but we suddenly find that he's up on the

television screens, up on the news media and all that sort of thing. Well now, he never met me as a branch chairman...and he certainly didn't come to our branch to seek representation all the way through this argument. It was a question of the media versus the company and the whole coloured sector. It did build up a bit of an anti-feeling of Paul Stephenson, at that time, because it was being seen that Paul Stephenson was using some expertise which was not in unison with our approach".⁵⁶

The truth was that, at best, the union did not have an approach to the issue of racial discrimination. Ron Nethercott had come to office as South West Regional Secretary of the union in 1957, two years after the 1955 resolution against the employment of black labour had been passed. He remembers the colour bar issue as a sort of hot potato passed onto him by his local officers in a bizarre game of political football. According to Nethercott:

"We were breaking new ground here. I don't think there was any positive union policy on this. Well, I don't remember Cousins saying, 'Well, this is the policy of the union', or the executive saying, 'This is the policy.' There wasn't any policy... It was something that had never occurred before. I mean you were dealing with a one-off, a first situation.

"It wasn't really my problem to start off with. It was the problem of the officer of the day...Arthur Coxwell ... and a chap called [Cliff] Price. And I being in a sense the goal keeper of the union and not the centre forward, I mean I have to pick up all the sort of red hot potatoes whether they be on buses or docks or wherever they come from. I mean if it can't be resolved by the officers in the group then eventually it comes on my desk and I have to do the best to pick it up. So yes, it was a very odd problem for me because I was very much removed from buses. I never had anything to do with buses before! And I certainly never had anything to do with 'race relations'".⁵⁷

Nethercott could not have been quite the political innocent he makes out. There may not have been a directive from the National Executive on "Race Relations" but the union at branch level, and more recently the Bristol Omnibus Company, had made their position clear. And Nethercott himself had recently been interviewed about his union's position on race discrimination in the local press!⁵⁸ Nethercott's recollection of events seems to play down some of the very unbrotherly attitudes expressed by his rank and file members.

For Nethercott and his officials, then, the issue of racial justice instantly receded into the outfield. As the media roared its disapproval,

the main priority became the protection of the union's reputation and the defence of its members against the charge of racism.

Stephenson, by contrast, did not have a union background. He had not been brought up, as had Nethercott, on the importance of working class solidarity and the triumph of Labour. Both men had been profoundly influenced by their Christian upbringing, but where Nethercott saw the burning moral issue as class inequality, Stephenson saw it as racial injustice. Stephenson recalls:

"My line was simply this: this is an employment issue, if the unions don't like it they can go to Hell. What matters is the employer—which in this case was Patey—should say 'we're not accepting this kind of racism' and tell the workers if they don't like it they can lump it! So I didn't see why I had to go to the unions for it. The decision was for management! It was a...moral obligation for the management!"

This was hardly in line with trade union principles and was bound to cause friction between the two camps. But over and above that, the union did not seem to treat the existence of racial discrimination as a matter of urgency. Consider Nethercott's version of events:

"Arthur Coxwell came to me and said we had a problem on the buses and I said, 'What's it all about?' 'Oh,' he said, 'it's about taking on coloured labour.'

'Well,' I said, 'what is the problem?'

'Well,' he said, 'we're being accused of racial prejudice or our members are because they won't work with coloured people.'

Well, I must say, I think I've got to say this, I've always believed it and I honestly believe it and I'll believe it to my dying day, [it was taken] out of all proportion. I think it was a thing that we could have resolved very quickly in this city, but I think situations grew upon situation which, no doubt about it, the local press enjoyed it. Without doubt it was a field day for them. I mean honestly, they played this thing up so it became a major issue, crisis..."⁵⁹

Jack Hodge also blamed the media for making needless trouble. It is indicative of the TGWU's deep-seated defensiveness that Hodge felt reporters should not have spoken to individual members without first getting the union's permission!

"I'll make it quite clear that as far as I was concerned, I would not make any representation to the branch that opposed any intake of coloured workforce into the Bristol Omnibus Company. I do know that there was a tremendous trend by both the Independent Television

Section and the BBC on television and the radio, that went deliberately out of their way to try and select people, drivers and conductors, females, you name it, on bus stops. They deliberately introduced discussion with drivers, conductors, female drivers, female conductors on their reaction to the colour problem and that was done completely without the authority of the branch!"

By contrast, Stephenson had, for the moment at least, much easier relations with the press and he knew how to exploit them well. The proposed boycott got front page coverage in the Jamaican paper *The Gleaner*, and was reported in the major national dailies. Claudia Jones also covered the story in her paper *The West Indian Gazette*.⁶⁰

One of Stephenson's most important publicity coups was to obtain the world famous cricketer Sir Learie Constantine as an ally. On the eve of the big cricket match between Gloucestershire and the West Indies in Bristol, Sir Learie strode onto the pitch. In his official capacity as High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago, he wrote to the Bristol Omnibus Company about their refusal to have black crews, and he dispatched an official to Bristol to "make informal enquiries into the dispute".⁶¹

Stephenson then informed the press, with an insouciance that must have set Nethercott's teeth on edge, that the West Indian Development Council might invite Sir Learie to arbitrate between the company, the West Indians and the Transport and General Workers' Union.⁶²

We need to remember that Commonwealth diplomats carried more clout in British affairs than perhaps they do today. Their actions were certainly more newsworthy. For the cherished ideal that Commonwealth members should enjoy the same rights and status as native born British subjects, though recently challenged by the 1962 Immigration Act, was not to be discarded until 1971.

White liberal opinion was also roused to action by the press revelations of the colour bar. On the first of May a hundred or so university students marched on both the bus station and the TGWU headquarters at Transport House.⁶³ Nethercott was reportedly "furious".⁶⁴ He told the marchers:

"We don't want discrimination and we don't like it. There is no question of a colour bar as far as we are concerned. Without consulting

A hundred
university
students
marched
on the bus
station

the Regional Committee, I am prepared to say that if there are coloured workers on the buses, our people will accept them".⁶⁵

The demonstrators came from a loose coalition of left/liberal groups similar to those associated with anti-racism today. They were mainly members of the university Liberal and Labour clubs, CNDers and the (now defunct) Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD). Nethercott called them "sincere but very misinformed".⁶⁶

The pressure on Nethercott intensified when, on the day after the protest, he and the union's Regional Chairman, Desmond Brown, went to meet the Town Clerk and representatives of the Jamaican High Commissioner.⁶⁷ The union and city officials must have been particularly embarrassed to read that same evening the banner headline in *The Bristol Evening Post*:

"BRISTOL BUS CREW BACK THE BOSS"⁶⁸

The next morning, the *Western Daily Press* headline quoted the busmen's declaration:

"WE WON'T WORK WITH WEST INDIANS"⁶⁹

Both *The Post* and the *Western Daily Press* and the two local television networks made much of rank and file opposition to Nethercott's "no colour bar" stand. According to one report:

"Bristol's busmen made it clear yesterday that they do not want to work with West Indians. They heckled a procession of anti-colour bar marchers as it passed through the city centre. And bus driver Ted Neale told me last night: 'The Transport and General Workers' Union is wrong in thinking we will support the West Indians.' 'Mr Ron Nethercott is barking up the wrong tree in thinking there is no opposition over employing coloured labour.' 'If it came to a paper vote I think the majority of the bus crew members would reject the move'."⁷⁰

Lawrence Lindo, Jamaica's High Commissioner, tartly observed from London that staff shortages did not seem to alter the position of those supporting the colour bar: "It would appear that Bristol is now openly saying that it prefers to have an inadequate transport service rather than employable and qualified workers from among Commonwealth citizens".⁷¹

As Bristol bus crews apparently dug in their heels, the big guns of Labour rolled in. Tony Benn, then MP for Bristol South East, declared his support for the boycott: "I shall stay off the buses, even if I have to find a bike!"⁷²

Fenner Brockway, Labour MP for Eton and Slough, prepared to table a question about the colour bar to the Tory Transport Minister.⁷³ And most

newsworthy of all, the leader of the Labour opposition had been rallied, by Benn, to the cause. On 2 May *The Post* headline proclaimed:

“NOW WILSON JOINS THE COLOUR BAR FRAY”

Wilson, it seemed, had told an anti-apartheid rally in London that: “The last example of the colour bar [in Britain] is now being operated by the Bristol Omnibus Company”.⁷⁴

This admittedly over-optimistic assessment did not obscure the fact that Wilson lent his full support for the boycott. The story had gone truly “national”: “I’m glad that so many Bristolians are supporting the campaign to get it abolished. We wish them every success”.⁷⁵

Even with the City Council there was the odd left wing renegade ready to make trouble. On 2 May that redoubtable old lefty the Alderman Henry Hennessey spoke out against the collusion he alleged existed between Patey and the union over the colour bar. Hennessey’s remarks must have been particularly mortifying as he was a member of the Joint Transport Committee.⁷⁶

The very next day, this veteran socialist, who had served on the council for over 40 years, faced expulsion from his own Labour Group within the council.⁷⁷ The official reason was his outspoken remarks about housing policy. But the timing of this threat against him makes one suspect that his remarks on race must have also angered his increasingly right wing Labour colleagues.

The response of the Eastville bus crews to all this was to threaten a walk out if black labour was employed and to “withhold their voluntary contribution to Labour Party funds as a protest against yesterday’s intervention by Mr Harold Wilson and Mr A W Benn”.⁷⁸

And what of the press itself? The *Western Daily Press* wanted it both ways. The colour bar might be “shocking, disgusting and degrading”, according to an early editorial, but why not impose a bit of racial segregation to put things right?

“White men will never take kindly to working under coloured men. This is wrong but it is inescapable. The solution obviously is to have sections in which coloured and white folk work apart so that the coloured man has a fair chance of promotion”.⁷⁹

This “separate but equal” principle had underpinned racial segregation in the Southern US since 1896. It had proved to be a good deal more “separate” than “equal”! Just as Martin Luther King Jr was waging his historic campaign against segregation, here was the *Western Daily Press* trying to initiate it in Bristol!



The *Evening Post* was not so clumsy. Its editor urged negotiation: "This is a time for Cool Heads. We want no Little Rock in Bristol".⁸⁰

Now, "Little Rock" a town in Arkansas, the deep South of America, had become a symbol of racism and conflict. In 1957 the state governor, one Orvel E Faubus, had acted to stop the desegregation of schools which had been ordered after a Supreme Court ruling. Faubus had sent 200 armed troops to stop nine black children from attending the city's all-white high school. The vision of children being turned back by troops and threatened by a howling and dangerous white mob was hardly comparable, either in scale or intensity, to what was happening in Bristol. But while critics might dismiss the comparison altogether as an example of press sensationalism, others might argue that there were parallels. They might contend that the unfairness of Patey's stance and the unexpectedly vociferous demonstration of some white bus crews could just possibly develop into something very nasty indeed. In any case, it is interesting to see how events outside Britain helped to shape Bristolians' perceptions of their own internal affairs.

Public sentiment had been further inflamed that Wednesday, 3 May, when local television covered the story.⁸¹ Busmen and buswomen were interviewed and their views were, for the most part, unashamedly hostile to the introduction of black personnel. The blatantly racist sentiments that were broadcast must have shocked many viewers.

Ron Nethercott, by this time, felt himself to be a man under siege.

As he saw it, the West Indians and the media were pulling him one way, the busmen another. Worst of all, his union colleagues seemed content to leave him to face the hostilities on his own.

"I felt very lonely... I had nowhere to turn, nowhere to go for advice. The only advice I was getting was from anonymous filthy abusive letters and from the press".⁸²

Paul Stephenson, who was also getting abusive letters, was busy rallying his troops. He could not reap the full advantage he had hoped for from the big match on Saturday. The West Indies team had refused to give public support to the boycott (on the now familiar grounds that sport and politics didn't mix),⁸³ but their tour manager, Berkeley Gaskin, was photographed in a friendly pose with Stephenson and accepted his invitation to meet with the local West Indian community.⁸⁴ Then at the match itself Sir Learie, who was present, let reporters know of his opposition to the bus company's policy in no uncertain terms. During the game the largely white membership of CARD had been distributing leaflets urging cricket fans to support the bus boycott.⁸⁵

Ron Nethercott was involved with his own plans that Saturday. He had recruited a black TGWU member, none other than Bill Smith, to a special meeting of his South West Regional Committee.⁸⁶ Nethercott knew Smith personally; in fact he was the first and only West Indian person he knew at the time.⁸⁷ Because Smith had acted as an informal liaison man between the West Indians in Bristol and the City Council, and because he urged a more conciliatory approach than Stephenson, he was considered a "responsible person".

After a two and a half hour meeting, Smith was persuaded to sign a statement with the union which called pointedly for "sensible and, quiet negotiations" on the bus issue. For its part, whilst "reaffirming the union's national policy of opposing racial discrimination in any form", the union publicly accused Stephenson of "jeopardising the welfare of the city's coloured citizens", and deplored "the situation which has arisen as a result of Mr Stephenson's campaign".⁸⁸ The TGWU statement upheld, instead, "the reasonable approach made by Mr Bill Smith of the Bristol West Indian Association, and we consider him to be the spokesman of the West Indian population and not Mr Stephenson".⁸⁹

More criticism of Stephenson soon followed. It appears to have been orchestrated and marks the beginning of the end of his brief honeymoon with the local press.

A report for example was dredged up revealing that Stephenson's employers, the Bristol Youth Committee, had "carpeted" Stephenson for using its offices as a headquarters for the boycott campaign.⁹⁰ And more seriously, the leaders of the Bristol Council of Christian Churches, Dr Oliver Tomkins, the Bishop of Bristol, and the Rev J Newton, president of the Free Church Federal Council, also appeared to repudiate Stephenson and the West Indian Development Council:

"We seriously regret that what may prove to be an extended racial conflict...has apparently been created by a small group of West Indians professing to be representative. We also deplore the apparent fact that social and economic fears on the part of some white people should have placed the Bristol Bus Company in a position where it is most difficult to fulfil the Christian ideal of race relations..."⁹¹

How interesting that the West Indian Development Council is blamed for creating conflict, especially when the church itself had been so ineffectual in its opposition to longstanding discrimination on the buses. How interesting, too, that the clerics imply that Patey would be willing to lift the colour bar if only his truculent workers would let him. As we shall later see, Sir Learie was soon to call the company's bluff.

In the *Daily Herald* an article was published in which Nethercott personally impugned Stephenson's character and motives, calling him "dishonest" and "irresponsible". Nethercott claims this was done in a moment of anger, after being remorselessly egged on by the press:

"I mean you talk about persecution, literally I had a period of persecution with [the] press ringing me up and making all sorts of comments about what Mr Stephenson had said about me etc and...you do get very angry... I was angry with what the *Daily Herald* were telling me and I said, 'I'm sorry I have to tell you he's a liar.' And that was it...the *Daily Herald* published it and it's wrong to call somebody a liar but that's how I felt at the moment in time and that's a genuine emotion. I mean I'm flesh and blood..."⁹²

In any event, Nethercott had overreached himself. Stephenson, who by this time was also beginning to feel "hounded" by the press sued him for libel and now reckons that he was the first black man to win such a case in the High Court. Nethercott was obliged to apologise and pay costs and compensation.⁹³

But such humiliation was still in the future. There was more nearer to hand, as the May Day Rally in Eastville on Sunday 6 May was to prove. There members of the Bristol Trades Council, which was a good deal

more right wing than it is today, personally lobbied TGWU officials to take a more energetic stand against the colour bar. Critical comments about the union's position were also made from the platform and as one Trades Council member who was there at the time remembers:

"there was a great deal of barracking of the TGWU. You see, the mass of the people who turn out on May Day tend to be left wing activists and it was a big turnout... The TGWU appeared in a very poor light because they had a mass demonstration of local people here criticising them in public".⁹⁴

According to *The Gleaner*, the rally passed a resolution reaffirming "our belief in the brotherhood of man regardless of race, colour or creed".⁹⁵

Few, if any, West Indian activists were at Eastville, but were instead attending what may well have been the first black-led march against racial discrimination in Britain. The numbers were small. Estimates vary between 45 and 200 men and women. Peter Carty, who had recently been recruited by Stephenson into the West Indian Development Council, remembers: "We get out up to City Road one day and we have a march to the end of the road, but we then decide to march to Redcliffe Church... and we...get up there and stand out there at the side of the road and have our protest".⁹⁶

Nearly all the people on that march were black working people.

Carty, a Barton Hill Bakery worker, welcomed the opportunity to do something about the bus company's discrimination which, he explained, had affected several of his friends. Other people in the West Indian community were less enthusiastic. "Will James" felt the boycott idea was unrealistic since West Indians were usually dependent on public transport to get the work. Others, according to Roy Hackett, were more fearful: "Some black people think we should not ripple the water." Paul Stephenson was disappointed that one pastor of a large black congregation who had planned to lead his flock on the march changed his mind at the last minute. Yet the same pastor let the council use church rooms for meeting without charge.⁹⁷

Overall, there does seem to have been a marked reluctance on the part of most West

Stephenson
regretted
that he was
unable to
involve the
churches

Indians to be actively involved. Roy Hackett maintains that West Indians feared victimisation:

"...they were afraid somehow...because of their jobs. They think because they are few in numbers, if their bosses who see them on TV or in the paper, the *Evening Post* would've carried a headline to say, 'Well so and so had been demonstrating against the buses,' they think they would have had the sack. Although I had a job just like everybody, all of us have a job...but if somebody's not prepared to do something so that the rest can benefit then life would never be worth living at all."

But Hackett, Stephenson and Henry also lay the blame on the political quietism of the West Indian churches. Owen Henry speaks for all of them when he states:

"I find that most of the black religious people look at organisation work as politics and they don't want to be involved in politics. I think I'll have to disagree with them because as far as my understanding is concerned, anywhere where more than two or three people meets to discuss a problem is politics."

Stephenson greatly regretted that he was unable to involve the churches:

"because, you see, I knew it was the black churches that helped, that'd given Luther King in the South that power. And so I was working on the black churches. I didn't expect much from the white churches anyhow and I got what I expected! But I was expecting more from the black churches... It wasn't that they weren't in sympathy with what I was doing, but they weren't ready to get that involved on that social...and political level."

Whatever the reasons were, it was true that the mass of the West Indian community did not come out actively in support of the boycott. But this did not mean they opposed the campaign against the colour bar in principle: "mentally they [the West Indians] support the idea but not to say they were gonna get involved and stop taking the buses".⁹⁸

The move to isolate Paul Stephenson (and the West Indian Development Council) as unrepresentative was taken not by hardliners like Patey and the "hawks" of the Eastville Depot. Rather it was the strategy (either instinctive or planned) of "wets" like Nethercott and the Bishop of Bristol. It is likely that the city's Labour clique led by Alderman Wally Jenkins also preferred the more "amenable" Bill Smith to the abrasive young Stephenson. Smith was a "gradualist" who would agree with the council on the necessity of patient negotiation.⁹⁹ Stephenson by contrast had, in their view, acted like a bull in a china shop, trampling on

the protocol, smashing civic complacencies and upsetting the customers. Because they could not understand his passion, they suspected only the worst of his motives.

So with the best of intentions and an imperial arrogance, the churches and the union leadership attempted to identify the "true" leader for the West Indians in Bristol. Nethercott refused Paul Stephenson's offer to meet him, on the grounds that he was "unrepresentative".¹⁰⁰ In truth, there were no groups or leaders who could claim the loyalty, trust and allegiance of what was a politically unorganised migrant population. But as one critic observed, "it was nonsense to describe a group of West Indians as unrepresentative when no representative West Indian body existed".¹⁰¹

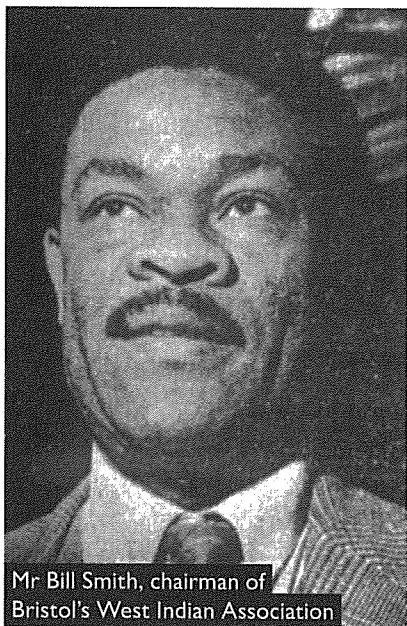
In any case, it was hardly the place of a white trade unionist, whose contact with West Indians had been limited to one individual, to pronounce on which individual was the legitimate leader of that community.

This may well be why, aside from some probable lobbying by Development Council members, Bill Smith's own organisation, the West Indian Association, publicly called "upon Mr Nethercott not to use Bill Smith as a stooge in this affair".¹⁰²

The efforts to isolate Stephenson and the Development Council's campaign might well have been effective had it not been for Sir Learie Constantine's direct and personal intervention. Constantine's vigorous condemnation of the colour bar contrasted starkly with the church's fence-sitting equivocation. Constantine, whose "constituency" after all was West Indian, unabashedly chose to ally himself with the boycott and express his own moral indignation about the colour bar: "For it to be happening in Bristol of all places is even worse when you remember that the West Indian sugar industry has helped, through the slaves sent by this country, to make Bristol great".¹⁰³

Sir Learie's meeting with the Lord Mayor did not yield dramatic results. (Perhaps this was because the Lord Mayor, Aderman Leonard Stevenson, had been a member of the Joint Transport Committee.) Constantine seems to have taken on board the economic anxieties of white bus crews on overtime which Stevenson no doubt outlined to him. He also decided to snub Patey and go straight to the Transport Holding Company in London which had ultimate control over the Bristol Bus Company management.¹⁰⁴

This seems to have put the wind up Ian Patey, for the next day he somewhat astonishingly denied that his company operated a colour bar,



Mr Bill Smith, chairman of
Bristol's West Indian Association

pointing to the presence of black cleaners and maintenance workers as evidence!¹⁰⁵

Nethercott also seemed to be responding to mounting pressure against the colour bar. He told *The New Statesman* that:

"...he had reached a stage in negotiations with the main West Indian Association in the city and with his own members on the buses when it would soon be possible to approach the company even though there were still white people looking for bus jobs... [Nethercott] assured me that he was on the point of success; success at least to the extent that the ball would be played at last into the

company's court. But the present crisis he thinks has destroyed much of his work. 'My 3,000 busmen have now got their backs to the wall through this declaration of war [by Stephenson]'.¹⁰⁶

There is a whiff of humbug about this statement, for what work had Nethercott been doing until Stephenson goaded him into it? By his own admission, he had done nothing about racial discrimination until the boycott was declared.

Nethercott's shifting position was probably attributable to some nobbling by the union leadership. For shortly after his meeting with Bristol's Lord Mayor, Sir Learie had called on Frank Cousins, then the National Chairman of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

"I returned to London to see Frank Cousins whom I had known well—and indeed had been friends with—since working in the Ministry of Labour. I knew his union was against a colour bar...so it was clearly a matter of asking them to enforce their own convictions".¹⁰⁷

In the meantime, some unnamed Jamaican residents in Bristol had begun to complain that their High Commissioner was not doing enough to pressurise bus officials.¹⁰⁸ Why, they wondered, had Mr Lawrence Lindo stayed in London when Sir Learie had come to Bristol personally to defend their interests? There is more than a hint in *The Gleaner* that

Lindo resented the Trinidadian High Commissioner for showing him up.¹⁰⁹ Within two days of Constantine's Bristol visit, Lindo held discussions with Sir Philip Warter and Sir Reginald Wilson, the chairman and director of the Transport Holding Company. Their meeting resulted in Warter and Wilson disavowing Bristol's colour bar policy. Both men gave Lindo their public and "unqualified assurance" that their subsidiary company in Bristol would end its discriminatory practices. Lindo accepted that the Holding Company had previously issued a general policy directive of no discrimination but that "this had been ignored in Bristol".¹¹⁰

Rather than forcing Patey to end the bar with a written directive, the Holding Company, clearly embarrassed, dispatched one of their senior men to Bristol to conduct "very delicate negotiations" between Bristol Omnibus Company and the union.¹¹¹

Patey's attitude was variously interpreted by the national and local press. He had become the company's general manager a year or two after the 1955 ballot forbidding black crews. Although Alderman Hennessey had charged him with negotiating the colour bar with the union, he strenuously denied it. A profile piece on Patey in the national *Daily Sketch* characterised him as an impressive, self-confident, "entirely professional" manager who manfully bore the responsibility for his employment policy: "Mr Patey avoids no responsibility: while other bus companies all over the country refused to allow coloured labour and keep quiet about it, Mr Patey has brought this storm upon himself by his honesty and frankness".¹¹²

A *New Statesman* journalist was less impressed, describing Patey as, "a tall blond man who uses terms like Liberal and Labour as if they are a little unclean".¹¹³

There is not enough evidence to conclude whether or not Patey was boxing clever and trying to sabotage the colour bar by openly defending it on the grounds of his employees' prejudice. After all, it would be logical for him to welcome a new supply of cheap labour and discredit the union at the same time.

But Patey's statements were so patently racist, so full of contempt for black people, that it is likely he had a personal distaste for hiring "coloured" bus crews. In London, he alleged, "coloured crews" were "arrogant" and not of sufficiently high calibre; in any case, local, ie white, men should have preference. There was also the suggestion that white conductresses and female passengers might be endangered by the presence of black crews.¹¹⁴ Evidently, it was not only Liberals and Labourites who were "a little unclean".

Whatever Patey's private feelings, he was clearly under pressure from London to change his policy. The papers in that first week of May were full of stories about black unrest elsewhere in the world. From America came the report that "Alabama Negroes defy Police".¹¹⁵ From Kenya, then still a British colony, came an account of "Africans' Attack on British Soldiers".¹¹⁶

Even closer to home, in Westminster itself, race was a major issue, as Fenner Brockway continued his longstanding fight to introduce a bill against racial discrimination to a resident parliament.¹¹⁷ And Tony Benn in a prominent article published the day before Bristol's council elections, urged *Western Daily Press* readers to ensure their candidates opposed Bristol Omnibus's colour bar.¹¹⁸

Two editorials in *The Times* and the *Telegraph* expressed disapproval of the Bristol Omnibus Company's colour bar in language which revealed the fears and prejudices of the editors themselves. The *Telegraph* prophesied: "Such scandals of intolerance as these are not a local but an international danger for more and more the dark races are conscious of a common interest and will support one another's struggles for emancipation".¹¹⁹

The Times, speaking of the "colour problem", rather in the way people spoke of the "Jewish problem" 30 years before, also gazed worriedly into the future:

"In general the West Indians and the rest have come to Britain because there were jobs to be done which would not have been done otherwise. The problem their presence creates constitutes one of those problems which will have to be solved—just as much as the future of the railways, or the location of industry or the planning of our cities—if the Britain of the coming decade is to be a good place to live in".¹²⁰

The Times editorial goes on to make the important point that although Britain was quick to pass a bill restricting immigration in 1962 (actually, the Tories were planning this from the time of the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots in the 1950s), little positive help was extended to help those immigrants already in the country.¹²¹ As a subsequent letter to *The Times* pointed out, parliament seemed curiously unwilling to set its collective weight behind measures which would ban discrimination in public places and in employment, and which would forbid the incitement to racial hatred.¹²²

But if parliament still had its back to the winds of change, Patey knew well which way to blow. Within a week of his meeting with his London

superior, Patey publicly appealed, with dazzling effrontery, to “his” busmen for “a real gesture of goodwill in the colour bar dispute”.¹²³

The TGWU seemed caught out by this startling U-turn. The *Western Daily Press* reported a surprised Cliff Price, secretary of the union’s busmen’s branch, admit: “I did not know this statement was being issued”,¹²⁴ adding immediately: “I must say I agree with the sentiments expressed”.¹²⁵

Arthur Coxwell, then the South West Organiser of the union’s transport section, refused to comment on this new development until he consulted the busmen themselves.

Patey had scored a propaganda victory, for both local papers ended up congratulating him for his swift and effective response, and scolded union leaders for their “cool” one. Patey, said the *Post*’s editor was:

“quite right. Goodwill is needed more than anything else. What a pity the union response, so far at least, has given the impression of being cautious and reserved. A little more warmth and generosity of spirit would not prove nearly so lethal as some union leaders seem to imagine”.¹²⁶

For the next four months the company and the union were locked in secret negotiation. A veil was drawn over the issue both in the council and the press. While all this is going on, we can consider a question we have so far avoided. Just what did the rank and file think about the employment of “coloured crews”?

Were the busmen and women all virulent racists? Or were they, as one source charged, just a particularly “bloody-minded lot, more alienated than Russian waiters”? Or were they, as one local Communist claimed, merely blameless pawns whose support for the colour bar had “rubbed off from the top”?¹²⁷

Certainly the busmen and women had good reason to feel bloody-minded. Bus crews had suffered a relative decline in wages since the war, and a corresponding decline in morale. The beloved trams had been scrapped during the war and bus drivers, according to one source, were earning less than the aerospace workers, a reversal of the pre-war position.¹²⁸ Both drivers and conductors were increasingly dependent on overtime to make ends meet: “[Overtime] could put your wages anywhere up to two or three pounds [by the 1950s] which is a big thing. It was at least more than half your wages”.¹²⁹

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Bristol was the only large city not to have a fully municipalised bus service. "John Garrett" felt that conditions would have been much better if only the city had purchased the service when it had the option to do so in 1937:

"If the corporation had run the stuff we [the bus crews] would have moved out into the NJAC [National Joint Industrial Council for Municipally Owned Transport Undertakings] who were getting better conditions including superannuation that would have been beneficial... Instead of that they had this jointly owned undertaking [with the Bristol Omnibus Company]...[and] they were allowing the company to run the job".¹³⁰

The low pay and unsocial hours made a job on the buses unattractive to most Bristolians in the days of relatively full employment. Shifts, as one woman who worked as a conductor in the 1960s explained, were:

"different every week, split duty, [was] 6.30-9.00 am then go back on [at] 11.45-2.00 pm and then back home and back to work again at 3.30-6.00 pm. Some were over 12 hour shifts, they got an hour a day extra for a double split!"¹³¹

Just after the war, as Jack Hodge remembers, "there were a number of people that were engaged [by]...the bus company, that were of different origins. We had Poles, we had Germans, we had Italians, we still got them today".¹³²

So why was there an unwillingness to hire black workers?

Nethercott and Hodge are keen to play down rank and file opposition to black workers. Neither, when I interviewed them in 1985, volunteered any information about the existence of the 1955 resolution against the employment of coloured bus crews. They preferred instead to pin such opposition onto an unrepresentative minority of their members. Hodge, for example, maintains that "you know we always had, way back in the 1930s, that sort of minority in our own union that had been against any assimilation of Commonwealth workers".¹³³

Ron Nethercott, like Jack Jones, his Midlands counterpart in the 1950s, preferred to characterise the issue as a purely economic one:

"And this is something I could never get the press [or] the Bishop of Bristol at that time [1963] to understand, that it was not about a racial problem; it was about bad conditions on the buses; it was about low pay... If we'd have had an influx of additional crew, albeit Irish, Canadian, French, German, English, the resentment would still be there. It wasn't a matter of coloured people, it was a matter of taking away people's ability to earn overtime to live! And this wretched thing [the dispute]! Nobody

wanted to hear this point of view... Basically this was a problem of people's conditions of work. Low paid busmen...were very badly paid...and the two or three pounds extra they were getting in terms of overtime was the difference between living...and existing".¹³⁴

By this line of thinking, it becomes apparent that busmen and women at the Lawrence Hill and Eastville Depots in East Bristol would have felt particularly threatened by West Indian workers because, as most West Indians lived in the St Paul's and Easton areas, they would have been assigned to those depots. Between 1960 and 1963 the West Indian population in Bristol had doubled to around 7,000 people to form a very conspicuous pool of reserve labour.¹³⁵

On the other hand, as Jack Hodge himself reveals, there was a severe labour shortage on the buses in 1963, due to an alarmingly high turnover rate:

"Now we had a branch of 2,000 strong, drivers and conductors. Our changeover of staff was working out on average at 600 per year, so you can appreciate that in three years we had a complete changeover of staff. And that was going on for years even when I came out of the army, colossal. Now it was [such] a state of affairs that buses were coming off the road".¹³⁶

And as Jim Cheek, who was a shop steward at the Brislington depot in 1963, points out:

"People were fearful of an influx of people from elsewhere, [on the grounds it] would be reducing their earnings potential... But it was unfounded of course, because we've always had a massive turnover of staff and even with the labour market today, we're still drivers short".¹³⁷

This fearfulness cannot be explained simply in terms of the crews' feelings of extreme economic insecurity. There is a territoriality about their response to outsiders. Perhaps it was the influx of an identifiably different group of people, in larger numbers than the sprinkling of Poles, Italians and Germans, which was exciting alarm. There is a West Country saying, "The Arabs begin at Swindon", the "A" in "Arab" being contemptuously pronounced like the "A" in "Alien". This refined version of "The Wogs begin at Calais" expresses an intense localism characteristic of Bristol, a localism which has been directed against other out groups in the past. As one F James wrote to the *Evening Post* during the colour bar dispute:

"In the late thirties, I happened to be one of a large number of Welshmen who through no fault of their own were forced reluctantly to



Sir Learie Constantine
with the Lord Mayor
of Bristol. *Evening Post*
4.5.63

leave their homes and find employment elsewhere. Most of us settled for Bristol for obvious geographical reasons. By and large we were received very unfavourably, partly because of our accent, but mainly because the Bristolian felt that he and he alone was entitled to work in Bristol.

"Now comes the question of coloured people obtaining employment on buses. Personally I am convinced that colour has very little bearing on the case as far as the Bristolian is concerned. It is simply the fact that these coloured people are 'outsiders'. Whereas in the thirties, the excuse was accent, today it is colour".¹³⁸

Ron Nethercott, fiercely loyal to his Bristol members, admits on questioning that there might have been more than economic worries behind the bus workers' attitude to black labour, but he refuses to call it "prejudice":

"I'm not prepared to say they [the busmen] were prejudice[d]. I'm prepared to say people were probably fearful of something they didn't understand in the sense it was a new dimension of their life... Basically it came down...to this great fear of their living standards being affected".¹³⁹

But what is at the root of this "great fear"? And how did Nethercott square his longstanding accommodation with his workers' anti-immigrant stance (before 1963) with his own strongly held Christian principles? (Nethercott had nearly become a parson before opting for a union career.) It seems that his solution was to deny that such fear implied racial prejudice. Other public figures, however, like Ronald Bell, the Tory MP for Buckingham South, were not so torn.

Like Nethercott, Bell also acknowledged the widespread "fear" about living standards among the white population. But as he chillingly explained to the Commons debating the Immigration Bill in 1962, in language which prefigures Thatcher's, economic fears were but the tip of a racist iceberg:

"Behind all is fear. Fear for standards, fear for material interests, fear of excessive fertility on the part of the immigrants, of being swamped in our own country. They [the whites] fear miscegenation [inter-racial marriage]".¹⁴⁰

Local fears about living standards were similarly grounded in racial stereotypes. As the following extract from an interview with two veterans of an East Bristol Depot in the early 1960s shows:

MD: Tell me what you remember [about the 1963 dispute].

MR GREY: Well, they didn't want the coloured people. Actually at the time they [coloured people] were working in Bath. But we didn't exactly want them here.

MD: Tell me about the "we".

MR GREY: Well, the crews, the crews on the buses... Actually we didn't want them at all, really.

MD: What were some of the things people...[at the depot] were saying against coloured crews?

MR GREY: They said there were white people out of work that needed the job. But the white people, a lot of the white ones wouldn't take it because of the hours. I mean it was last thing at night, first thing in the morning...

MD: What were some of the other objections you remember some of your colleagues saying?

MR GREY: Well, they were on about their food. Some of them thought they ate Kit-e-Kat! [Laughs].

MRS GREY: Some conductresses took a dim view of it about working with them late at nights.¹⁴¹

"Will James", who came on the buses in the 1960s, remembers talking to white drivers who had been originally against black crews.

"And we used to have long discussions about it. I couldn't understand why they didn't want to have black people on the buses. And some of the reasons they gave were to me, coming from the West Indies, were, I suppose, shocking... And you know they were saying the blacks shouldn't be on the buses because the passengers won't want to take the money from you, don't want to take the change from them".¹⁴²

Notions that it was unclean to touch black people, that black people ate Kit-e-Kat, that they were dangerous to white women in a working situation (it was assumed the blacks recruited would be male), go deeper than fears of economic competition. Black people, these objections imply,

are not quite human. They have animal habits and their very touch can pollute. Ignorance and suspicion take on a racialist dimension, a dimension tinged with unconscious superstition.

One needs to remember what a very “white” place Bristol had been in the early 20th century. The African slaves who had been kept as servants in 18th century Bristol had long since melted into the general population. (It is a neat irony that some of the fairest Bristolians of them all might have had black ancestors.) But by the 1930s there were only a very few black families in Bristol, probably migrants from the West Indies, most notably perhaps the well-known boxers, Dixie Green and his son.

Beyond that, as Jack Hodge, whose sea captain father would occasionally invite his Lascar cook home to share their Christmas dinner, recalls: “They were in such a minority you had no occasion to, you know, worry about them, there was no worry, it was just a case of recognising them.”

Ron Nethercott who lived in Barton Hill had little cause to “worry” either. “I literally had no dealings with our coloured friends at all.” He goes on to relate that:

“The only coloured person I ever saw [as a boy] was in a film!... Paul Robeson! I can’t honestly say that in my life—I’m talking of when I was 13 maybe 14—I can’t even remember seeing a coloured person.”

Later in the interview Nethercott did remember his father chatting to some black sailors from Avonmouth and maintained that these occasional strangers were regarded more with curiosity than fear. But “Tim Spring” who lived in the more cosmopolitan area of Broadmead in the 1920s disagrees:

“I lived in the Horsefair as a kiddy and we had Italians and there was a couple of coloured families [so] I was sort of used to dealing with them. But you know of course as... [‘John Garrett’] said there was people that hadn’t met the coloured, it was only natural they was going to feel strong about accepting them.”

This assumption, that it was “natural” to feel “strong” or fearful about a new group of people, begs a few questions. Had the upbringing and education which Bristolians received before the 1960s encouraged them to welcome diversity or to suspect it? Recent studies of education and popular culture suggest that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, young people were imbued with a jingoistic sense of their own cultural superiority over non-white peoples, even as they were encouraged to feel inferior to their so-called “betters”.¹⁴³

Certainly newsreels in the 1930s banned any references to poorly governed British colonies, Englishmen who went native, or references to inter-marriage, especially between black men and white women.⁴⁴ But more work needs to be done on the actual experience of white Bristolians just before and after World War Two before we can properly assess the influence of education and popular culture on racial attitudes.

What is apparent is that the arrival of black people is associated in many Bristolians' minds with a general deterioration in the quality of urban life—a deterioration over which they have had little control. In the early 1960s the local papers were full of the “redevelopment” of Barton Hill. Despite the protests of residents and community workers, this 19th century East Bristol neighbourhood was partially demolished to make way for council tower blocks. Nethercott remembers the area before such change occurred:

MD: Were there many coloured people, immigrants or non-English people in Bristol when you were a child?

RN: Not when I was a child... I lived in East Bristol and brought up there in Barton Hill which was, uh, very much a good—and I say this in the best [sense] cause—it's very much still a good working class area—and certainly I can never remember, I mean, to see a coloured person was the exception rather than the rule...there was no coloured community when I was a child.

MD: You said you came from a good working class [family]. What were the values that make you say it was...good...?

RN: Well, it was like most families around East Bristol at that particular time. Most of them were good, we had poverty, we knew poverty, we knew unemployment, but we were politically motivated and we were about changing society. My mother would attend political meetings with my father, I'd go with them as a kid and sit in the local church hall and bait and interrupt the Tory candidate...they were all involved in politics but they were very honest, moral people...I'm talking about moral in everything that they did. There was nothing tainted or dishonest or nothing creepy. It was a community where one could trust each

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form

other. You could leave your front door open, leave your back door open and, um, it was a lovely community. East Bristol was a super place...¹⁴⁵

Nethercott may have been idealising pre-war Barton Hill, but he is not alone in doing so. In recent years there has been a spate of locally published books of working class reminiscence. *Barton Hill Remembers: Bedminster Between the Wars*, books on old St Paul's, on St Philips and Westbury.¹⁴⁶ And all recall their close knit communities with affectionate regard. These remembrances evoke a Bristol before tower blocks and the Common Market, before permissiveness and economic decline, and... before the blacks. Next to such shining memories, burnished by the passing years, how tawdry must the city now seem—like a “fallen woman” on the City Road.

It is no good pointing out that black people did not cause the decline of our cities, but were themselves swept along in the vortex of post-war economic change. That they left the colonies which Bristol merchants had kept underdeveloped for long after the end of slavery. That they had grown up poorer and had been brought up more strictly than even those pre-war Bristolians.¹⁴⁷ For white working people in Bristol knew only that they felt powerless to stop the changes in their lives that the government made. They couldn't stop the high rise flats from flattening Barton Hill or the foreigners from invading St Paul's. For the most part, when they had time to think about these things at all, they saw in the new immigrants, not folks like themselves, just trying to survive, but a new and threatening burden imposed from on high. Class consciousness, a sense of “them and us”, did not exist in an unalloyed form. It had been transformed by the base metals of local chauvinism and racial prejudice.

Yet the colour bar issue did provoke one of the largest mailbags the *Evening Post* had ever received.¹⁴⁸ Many whites were against the colour bar, and not all of them were, as some might suspect, middle class “trendies” from Clifton. In fact there was a curious alliance between working class “Johnny Bulls” and “Old Colonials” from the posher parts of town, against employing black people. These ranged in tone from the purely economic and anti-foreigner to the explicitly racist.

A resident from the Albany Road, Montpelier, an area attracting West Indians from nearby St Paul's, maintained, “...colour has nothing whatever to do with the matter. The fact is the government has permitted tens of thousands of people from many other lands to drift over for an easy living”.¹⁴⁹

A contributor from the more middle class area of Westbury-on-Trym spoke in a similar vein:

"I have no bar but a Foreign Bar. That is European, including Southern Irish, all crowding into this country either claiming our jobs or our National Insurance and enjoying the labour conditions other people born in this country have fought for".¹⁵⁰

Such sentiments ignored the thousands of black servicemen and women who fought in the war for Britain, nor did it admit that cheap colonial labour had in part enabled the British working class to better their standard of living. But it is not as specifically racist as this classic contribution from an ex-colonial lady retired in Redland:

"I was born and bred in the West Indies, lived there 35 years and I can tell you that the black man still has a long way to go before he can claim to be really civilised. Fundamentally they are still children. They panic easily, do not know the true meaning of gratitude and become extremely officious when put in positions of authority. I have nothing against them and would be glad to employ one as a gardener or housemaid, but I shall be sorry to see them infiltrating our public services".¹⁵¹

It was not only the middle class who had reaped the benefits of empire. A bus conductor from the Staple Hill depot had lived a life of relative ease while serving in the forces abroad. He was, he told the *Post*, "quite content to have my meat bought from a coloured butcher and cooked by my coloured servant for myself, wife and children (and a good cook he was too)".¹⁵²

But, he confessed, he had been angered by the singling out of the Bristol Omnibus Company for what was a virtually universal practice. Undaunted by logic, he decided in protest to oppose the employment of black bus crews.

The anti-colour bar letters fall in two main camps: those who fully support Stephenson's campaign and those who repudiate his tactics in favour of Bill Smith's.

The pro-Smith contingent argued that "focusing the issue through protest marches and boycotts will increase rather than diminish friction between the races",¹⁵³ and that "the more patient approach of Mr Smith is the correct one. If there is prejudice in Bristol it will not disappear overnight".¹⁵⁴

Several themes run through those letters which condemned the colour bar in less qualified terms. Bristol's commuters could be very rude about their bus service, accusing the crews of being "indolent" and impolite, and complaining generally of poor service. The letters some



Raghbir Singh, Bristol's first black conductor, with driver Mr Roger Wilson. *Evening Post* 17.9.63

correspondents wrote used the threat of coloured labour to exact better standards from the bus crews. This was not an approach guaranteed to promote racial harmony, but understandable given the severe understaffing on the buses. This letter from St Anne's Park is typical:

"As a mother of two young children who has to take a pushchair when I go shopping, I wait in trepidation to see whether the conductor will be one of the very helpful ones who will step down and pick up the pushchair for me, or one of the gum chewing, stare-straight-ahead brigade who have to be asked to move out of the way of the luggage space so that I can struggle to put it away myself. If two independent justifiable complaints are received against any bus crew they should be sacked and their jobs given to coloured workers".¹⁵⁵

Christian social conscience prompted other readers to bear witness against what they saw as a moral wrong. This could put them at odds with the established churches as this extract shows. Here the writer is taking the Bristol Council of Christian Churches to task for dismissing Paul Stephenson as unrepresentative.

"Christ and His disciples also were a small group and regarded as unrepresentative by the establishment of their time. Can any Christian doubt what Christ's attitude to racial discrimination would have been?"¹⁵⁶

Some letter writers were worried about England drifting into the type of prejudice "rife in South Africa" or "the Southern states of the USA... which are a blight on the name of civilisation".¹⁵⁷ Others cited the skill and kindness of West Indian nurses, or remembered the contribution of the West Indian and Indian soldiers during World War Two: "If these people are fit to fight alongside in times of aggression then surely they are fit to work beside us".¹⁵⁸

Bristol's slaving heritage provided another theme. Colston's name was invoked by an African resident, and in one of several pro-boycott letters from the new council estate at Hartcliffe:

"Edward Colston, famous in this city, was a slave trader. He split up loved ones. Families never saw one another after he passed their way. We should be grateful that these dark people should work with us".¹⁵⁹

It is hard to tell which views are the most representative of white Bristolian opinion. Was it merely a few "famous sportsmen, noisy students and minority churchgoers" who supported the West Indian Development Council's campaign as one Redfield resident charged?¹⁶⁰

Admittedly, it was outsiders like Tony Benn, Julia Gaitskell, Anthony Lester who figured most prominently among Stephenson's white supporters. Benn was a longstanding member of the Movement for Colonial Freedom whose Bristol Council called an all-party meeting on the eve of negotiations to press for an end to the colour bar, and the integration of "Bristol's immigrants into the full life of the community".¹⁶¹ Certainly Bristol University lecturers like Ronald Sampson and Professor H Dickinson and John Malos identified publicly with the boycott. So too did other local left wingers inside and outside the council including Alderman St John Reid, Cllr J Boss, Don McLaren, The Rev Vivian Thomas and TGWU member and long-time activist J E Flowers.¹⁶² The local Communist Party vigorously campaigned during the council election against the colour bar.¹⁶³ There was also a petition against racial discrimination circulated by a youth worker in Hartcliffe which a number of busmen signed.¹⁶⁴

There is a Liberal or Lib-Lab thread running through many of the letters from the anti-discrimination camp. Tolerance, individual freedom, civil liberties—these are valued most by those whose common sense view of the world is based on liberal principles.¹⁶⁵

Not everyone valued these principles so highly. A more authoritarian strain also echoed through the *Post's* letters page. Some urged deportation of black immigrants from "this land of housing problems and unemployment".¹⁶⁶ The fact that some black people, like Stephenson, were not immigrants but British born had not, evidently, yet occurred to everyone. And even local socialists did not always acknowledge the rights of those West Indians already settled in Britain to stay:

"The vast majority of the homogenous Bristolians, I would say, do see the apparent 'injustice' of the bus company's ban, but this sympathy would certainly evaporate should the West Indian Development Council force their will on behalf of our uninvited guests. My constructive advice to the West Indian Development Council is: Hold your peace until British Socialism's 'Winds of Change' enable the West Indians to return to a prosperous and welcoming West Indian Federation".¹⁶⁷

It may be that the majority of Bristolians were not overly concerned about the bus boycott. Perhaps such political issues only commanded the attention of a committed minority. Such apathy however, if it were the norm, does imply a passive compliance with racial injustice.

What is certain is that racist ideas were widespread and not confined to any one class. Equally true is the fact that some white Bristolians were prepared to speak out publicly against the colour bar.

On 28 August 1963, 150,000 black and white Americans marched on Washington in the "biggest civil rights demonstration the nation has ever seen". "President Kennedy today called on the American people to accelerate their effort to achieve equal rights for all citizens".¹⁶⁸

In Bristol, on that same day, it was reported that the colour bar on Bristol's buses had ended. After months of negotiation and a union meeting the previous night attended by 500 of the city's 1,750 bus crews, agreement had been reached for "the employment of suitable coloured workers as bus crews".¹⁶⁹

"There will now be complete integration without regard to race, colour or creed. The only criterion will be the person's suitability for the job," said Mr Ian Patey, the company's general manager.¹⁷⁰ Arthur Coxwell, for the union, angrily denied that his members had ever passed a resolution banning black workers. The bar had been the company's policy, not a union one: "It had been a rigid [union] rule for many years that there should be no discrimination against coloured men".¹⁷¹ Adding, in a statement reported by *The Guardian* but not by the local press that, "If one depot passed a resolution it did not mean it would be endorsed higher up".¹⁷²

Patey did not disagree with Coxwell's assessment but charged that the public campaign of the previous May "had delayed the opening of negotiations with the union". This seemed rather a strange point to make since Patey himself admitted that "negotiations with the union had started only when a directive had been received from the London offices of the parent company".¹⁷³

And as we have seen, the London company was moved to action precisely because of the protests and public meetings.

Still, the settlement of the bus dispute was widely reported in the national press and gained the grateful expression of thanks from Paul Stephenson on behalf of the West Indian Development Council. Ten "coloured applicants" were soon to be interviewed for the post of conductor.¹⁷⁴ The union had saved face and the battle against the colour bar had been won.

But had it? There are no available records of the details of the settlement. But certain things do not seem to make sense.

It seemed odd, for one thing, that after all the aggro of the past few months, the Transport House meeting of the bus crews had gone so smoothly. There had been, we are told, "no criticism of the proposed agreement and few dissenters".¹⁷⁵ It seemed odd too, that Patey still maintained there was no labour shortage on the buses.¹⁷⁶ Could the memory of one former branch official be correct when he recollected that "the upshot of the thing was that it was agreed that 5 percent of the staff could be engaged as [coloured] conductors".¹⁷⁷

In other words, had the union and the company negotiated, not an end to the colour bar, but the institution of a racial quota? Could this be why more than two years after the end of the dispute, there were only four drivers and 39 conductors from ethnic minorities, less than 2.5 percent of Bristol's total bus crew?¹⁷⁸ Or was it, as Jack Hodge maintains, due to the difficulty of finding suitable black candidates? If candidates were in such short supply, why did another employee of the company assert that the quota was raised to 6 percent by the early 1970s?

In the absence of hard evidence we can, as they say, only speculate. Who were the lucky immigrants who obtained a job on the buses and how did they get on? Patey had announced

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union and
company
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a racial
quota?

that the main qualifications for conductors were: "a head for figures, a knowledge of the city and good references".¹⁷⁹

"These would be required of coloured applicants the same as whites... Patey had also told reporters well before any Bristol applicants had been interviewed that a 'large percentage of the latter [ie coloured applicants]... were often found unsuitable'.¹⁸⁰

But even Patey could not have found much fault with Bristol's first "coloured" conductor, Raghbir Singh. For a start, Singh was not West Indian and perhaps it was thought that hiring an Indian rather than a West Indian would cock a symbolic snook at the West Indian Development Council. Be that as it may, Singh certainly had a head for figures, having studied maths along with geography, English, art and history at college in the Punjab. He had come to England in 1959 while in his 30s, largely to ensure his children secured "a good English education". He settled with a friend in Bristol, because it was a university town and used the capital he had from his shoe business in Amritsar to buy a part interest in a house in Clifton. Then he brought over his wife and children, working first as a building labourer in Redcliffe, then as a machinist in Eastville and finally as a semi-skilled fitter in Stapleton. Singh decided to apply for the post of bus conductor even though it meant a substantial cut in wages:

"I wanted to see how true they are in this saying...whether they give this job to the ethnic minorities...let us see how they fulfil their promises. But they liked me and I liked them".¹⁸¹

Singh's appointment, reported, he told me, in at least one newspaper in India, was a landmark indeed. For, ironically, the company appointed a man who wore a turban. The right of Sikh busmen to wear beards and turbans had resulted in a number of racially inspired disputes in the Midlands.¹⁸² But here was Bristol inadvertently, one suspects, helping to blaze the trail for religious freedom: "Last night" (a wide eyed *Western Daily Press* revealed), "he [Singh] was wearing a blue turban. 'It goes with my uniform. If I wear a brown suit I have on a brown turban'".¹⁸³

A few days after Singh's arrival, four more black conductors took their places on Bristol's buses. Norman Samuels and Norris Edwards were Jamaicans; Mohammed Raschid and Abbas Ali were from Pakistan.¹⁸⁴ The white driver who took on Norris Edwards as his conductor did so, his wife explained, because no one else at the depot would work with him. The driver's attitude was initially one of resignation rather than enthusiasm though he soon grew friendly with Norris: "In any case, I thought, well it's got to come, it might as well be me, got to live with it, can't stop it."

There was, so far as one can gather from the evidence available, no outburst of organised open hostility on the part of the white bus crews towards the black ones. According to one conductress, "We never worried if they were black, white, coloured or what, we never took any notice... I think they were more or less accepted after the first couple of weeks."

But as one Lawrence Hill busman remembers:

"There was that little resentment that was against the coloured people. Every job, any job there was that resentment; it was entirely foreign to our nature. You see, you now have grown up where coloured people are accepted. But we weren't."

"There was", this same busman says, "the odd incident between someone who was violently anti-coloured," for example: "They'd talk disparagingly about them, didn't [they]...in the canteen." Or, "They might hear occasionally the word 'nigger' used but very rarely...but invariably that was done among ourselves... They'd [other white crews] do it jokingly sometime."

One white conductress recalls:

"You went in for your meals but you never sat with them. Well, you just didn't, did you, just sat with the other women and had our tea and the [white] men sat with the [white] men... But you don't know what to talk about with them, do you."

A woman who came on to the Eastville depot in 1964 confirmed that:

"There was a lot of conductresses wouldn't work with them ['coloureds'] at all. They used to change over with me. 'Cause I never bothered, you know, if he was coloured, he was coloured."

And another conductress admitted:

"I know the first time I ever worked with a coloured fellow, I was a bit nervous, 'cause it was a late turn. But he was very nice. West Indian, I think."

While some white drivers were friendly and polite, others reportedly sent their black conductors to Coventry. One Jamaican conductor of the time remembers his driver sitting in his cab during the stopovers reading his paper and never addressing a word to him. The sense of hurt and exclusion such incidents must have caused those who suffered them was simply not taken in by the white bus crews I interviewed.

The general view among the white bus crew I interviewed seemed to be that the "coloured crews" (or "darkies") settled without too much "fuss or bother".



Four of Bristol's first
black conductors.
Western Daily Press 18.9.63

As time passed, black bus crews were increasingly accepted, and it was resented when black crews did not adapt more wholeheartedly to the subculture of the buses.

"Tim Spring", who organised social events at one depot, resented what he perceived to be the lack of participation by black crews in such events. He felt that "if there was any bar at all put up, it was done by the black people, and not us."

Another busman concurred and suspected a conspiracy at work: "To my view, the leaders of those different communities said don't cohabit with the whites any more than you've got to, except at work."

"Mrs Regent", a conductress at the time, had a more sympathetic interpretation:

MD: They didn't mix as much with the whites?

MRS REGENT: No, I think they kept themselves apart a bit. Course I suppose more or less that was a bit of being on the nervous side you know. Didn't know perhaps how they would be accepted.

One Jamaican crew member dismissed both the conspiracy theory or the fear of rejection theory. Neither explained why he had not gone to the bus crew's club more often than he did.

"When I finish working, I don't want to hear about the job. And this is the thing that is set in the club is the talk is about buses all night!

[Laughs] I don't call it a social evening at all, talking about buses, the colour of buses, the number of buses. To me if I go out somewhere to enjoy myself I go to listen to the music and dance, something different than talking about buses!"

He went on to add that even when there was music at the club:

"You see, we can't dance to that type of music. We're not used to that type of music. And I suppose if most of us could dance the waltz that they do probably they [West Indians] would have join in more. But to sit all night and listen to 'Knees Up Mother Brown' and things like that, we're not used to that music!... It's a more lively atmosphere that we're used to and that's why we don't go."

Relations between Asians and white bus crews were, if anything, possibly more strained and problematic in the 1960s and 1970s. Although Raghbir Singh did not find this to be the case, there seemed on the part of some crews resentment against those "Pakistanis" who sat together and spoke in their own language in the bus canteen. One man related the following story with obvious delight:

FIRST INTERVIEWEE: We had a canteen in Old Market [in Central Bristol] and... Jack Hodge came in there and there was four Pakistanis talking in their own language. He [Hodge] thumped the table and he says, "If our money is good enough for you to earn," he said, "you'll talk our language while you're here."

'Cause they, well, this was a thing that used to happen quite a bit with the Pakistanis, they'd sit at this table and they're talking their lingo, and you don't understand... I'm glad that Jack Hodge came in that day and as a representative of the men he hit the nail right on the heads. Oh he thumped the table and his language, it was vile! But we didn't half enjoy [it]! [Laughs] You see, for all we know, they could've been saying—

SECOND INTERVIEWEE: [Interrupting]—what they like about us!

FIRST INTERVIEWEE: What they're saying may be quite innocent conversation, but we don't know!

MRS GREY AGREED: "What annoyed me was I didn't know whether they were talking about me or not! They probably were!"

And Will James, a Jamaican, recalled telling his Asian workmates: "When you are around a table, speak English. Because I don't know if you're planning to kill me or what!"

Feeling ran so high on this issue that, according to Mrs Grey: "It was brought up at union meeting that while they [the Pakistanis] were in the

company...and in the company of us in the canteen, they should use the English language and nothing else."

This seemingly trivial clash over language raises some interesting points. Were the Pakistanis being so very inconsiderate in speaking in what was after all their first language?

Why was it assumed their conversation was maliciously directed against their English speaking co-workers? Did the legacy of British colonialism ensure that Asian languages were associated in the popular imagination with murderous treachery? Or was it sheer parochialism which prompted the union's heavy handed response? One wonders how Britons emigrating to Hong Kong or the gulf states would have responded to a similar ban.

Despite such conflicts, friendships between individuals of different racial backgrounds did exist on the buses. This is not to say that such friendships meant that people abandoned their racial prejudice. One could have black friends and still resent "the blacks". Nor did such friendships imply a more "pluralistic" attitude on the part of white Bristolians. They could still adhere to a rigid insistence that when in Bristol, one had better do as the Bristolians do.

Interracial friendships may come under increasing strain as jobs become scarcer and conditions tougher. Two of the black bus men with whom I spoke felt that the present recession will continue to affect the black workers most of all, that they will be the, "last hired and first fired", and that, more than 20 years after the boycott, Bristol is still a white man's town.

Conclusion

Just how effective then had the campaign against the colour bar been? It seems to have left a rather acrimonious atmosphere between the leaders of Bristol Council, Wally Jenkins (Labour) and Gervaise Walker (Conservative) and certain sections of the black community. Perhaps, it could be argued, Stephenson had made things worse, not better, by his confrontational style? Perhaps the more patient tactics employed in Manchester against racial discrimination on the buses would have left a better legacy?

This is doubtful. In Manchester, O S S Sagar, a Sikh who waged a gentler fight for seven years on this issue, had friends in the council. Socialists and Liberals—including a number of Jewish councillors sensitive to the matter of civil liberties—had facilitated Sagar's struggle and advised him on tactics.¹⁸⁵ But leaving aside the question of whether one should have to wait seven years for a favourable outcome, how many Bristol councillors and aldermen were willing to take a stand against racial discrimination? The Conservatives certainly did not seem to be,¹⁸⁶ and the Labour Party was, with a few isolated exceptions,¹⁸⁷ conservative and parochial in its racial attitudes as its reluctance to take action about discrimination both before and after the bus dispute amply demonstrated:

"So determined is the city to feel that colour is no problem that when the New Bristol Group (a development of the seminars Anthony Wedgwood Benn held after his by-election speeches) put forward a scheme for actively improving race relations, the City Council Labour Group threw it out. And this despite the ugly row over coloured bus crews which had made this stately and cultivated city notorious a few months earlier. The intolerable point about the New Bristol Group's idea was that the proposed 'Citizenship Council' should be clearly and openly under the auspices of the City Council, established by the Lord Mayor, with a full-time liaison officer and the usual Corporation facilities".¹⁸⁸

Of course, it could be argued that had the dispute not been so "ugly", the council would afterwards have been more willing to put its resources where its lip service had for so long been. But it seems more likely that,

unchallenged, Bristol Council would have continued in its "stately and cultivated" way to do nothing about racial discrimination. It has been said that Bristol was and is a particularly snobbish and racist town, and that these characteristics stem in part from her history as a slave port. But what connection could there possibly be, one might ask, between the slave trade which ended in 1807 and the reception accorded to New Commonwealth immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s?

I think that there are links, but they are not direct ones. The most obvious one is that the rural migrants who came to Bristol were themselves the descendants of the slaves whose sale had helped to make Bristol so prosperous a place. It is symbolic that some of the first West Indians came to Bristol as stowaways on banana boats to Avonmouth. The first bananas came to England via Bristol in 1904,¹⁸⁹ and they are evidence of an underdeveloped West Indian economy geared to the convenience of England and the profit of the colonialists.¹⁹⁰

But there is a more subtle link. The town that waxed rich on the colonial trade was primarily a commercial city.¹⁹¹ And cities based on commerce and small-scale industry are less likely to breed a militant and class conscious work force than those based on large-scale industries like Manchester and Glasgow. Commercial cities, like Bristol or Liverpool, are, to paraphrase the words of another historian, "honeycombed" by personal ties of patronage and deference, and given to be very status conscious. Even lower paid workers, especially if they considered themselves to be "respectable" rather than "rough", would take care to distance themselves from lower status people of their own class.¹⁹² For like the poor white southerner in the American South of the 1950s, even the poorest Bristolian could feel he or she was at least "a cut above" the "darkies".

Another question that remains to be addressed is whether or not the campaign against the colour bar influenced subsequent legislation. Paul Stephenson thinks it did. The 1965 Racial Discrimination Act was effected under Wilson's regime. Tony Benn was in this government, and Tony Lester was being groomed for future office. Both were veterans of the Bristol campaign.

But the link between the Race Relations Act and the Bristol bus boycott was probably less straightforward than Stephenson might contend. The 1965 act banned discrimination in public places and accommodation but not in employment. The act dealing with employment was passed in 1968. Also Fenner Brockway had been campaigning for a law

against racial discrimination since 1954, long before the bus boycott. Still, it was Brockway who raised the question of discrimination on public transport in parliament, as a direct result of the Bristol colour bar, and he certainly supported the boycott. We might conclude that the West Indian Development Council's campaign was one of a number of factors which helped to raise the consciousness of parliament about the need to take a stand against racial discrimination. But if we do, we should also keep in mind that the Race Relations Acts have been seen by some commentators as merely a sop to make immigration restrictions more palatable.

Unfortunately, the Bristol bus dispute had a more directly decisive effect on the career of Learie Constantine who resigned early in 1964 from his post of High Commissioner of Trinidad and Tobago.

According to Sir Learie, his involvement in the dispute got him "into trouble" with his own government:

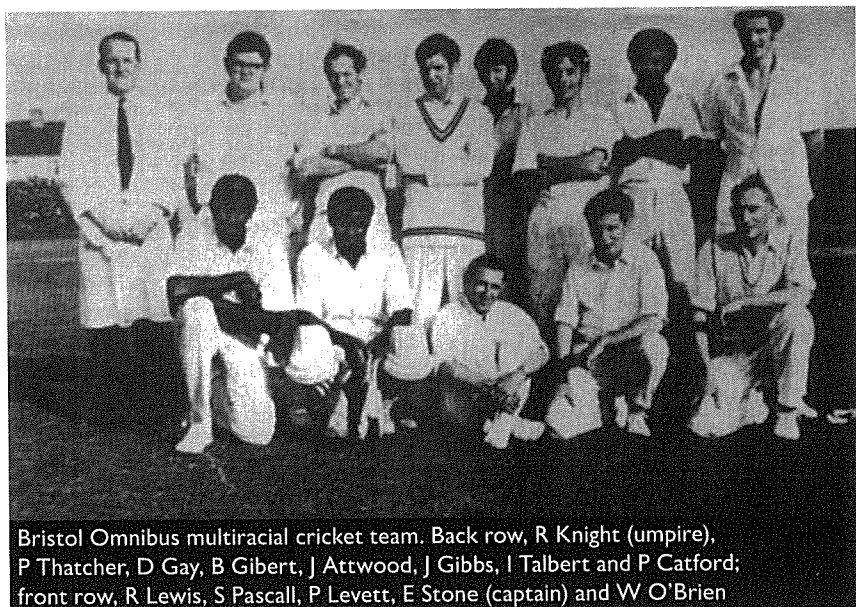
"Suffice it to say that among other things my government felt I had exceeded my duties during the Bristol affair and should have recognised it as an internal matter for management and union and refused to intervene".¹⁹³

It was a sad comment that the very person to act so constructively and forthrightly to secure the civil rights of black workers in Bristol should be dealt with in this way.

As far as the union was concerned, the bus boycott campaign raised both the consciousness and the defensiveness of the TGWU's regional leadership. And although union representatives are now quick to repudiate the colour bar as a remnant of the bad old days before the National Bus Company, they are still resistant to the notion that racial discrimination is built into the structure of British society. Ron Nethercott:

"I didn't know [of racial prejudice] until the bus strike came, I got to be honest. I never witnessed it from the bus strike and I've got to say I've never really witnessed it since! I've found very little prejudice expressed, certainly in my hearing, in my knowledge of the union since then. We have lots of coloured people in the union now."

By explaining the colour bar simply in terms of economic factors and a "natural fear of the unknown"; by minimising the existence and destructiveness of racism; and by ignoring the accommodations white trade unionists, as well as black and brown ones, will need in the future to make, the regional trade union leadership has shown it has learned less than it could have done from the Bristol Bus Dispute of 1963.



Bristol Omnibus multiracial cricket team. Back row, R Knight (umpire), P Thatcher, D Gay, B Gibert, J Attwood, J Gibbs, I Talbert and P Catford; front row, R Lewis, S Pascall, P Levett, E Stone (captain) and W O'Brien

Notes

- 1 *Evening Post*, 31 October 1961; J Ragg, "West Indians in Bristol", (nd but c 1958) in Correspondence re the Welfare of Coloured People, Avon County Records Office (ACRO), 3402c. Many of the articles from the Bristol local press on the 1963 bus dispute are contained in a book of cuttings in Avon County Reference Library's local collection entitled *The Coloured Population of Bristol*, B28096.
- 2 Mr Owen Henry, interviewed 2 July 1985 and 9 July 1985. See F F Lee, "Racial Patterns in a British City: an Institutional Approach", *Phylon*, (Spring 1960), pp40-50.
- 3 Mr Peter Cary, interviewed 11 December 1985. Ms Joyce Anakie, a Jamaican born nurse working at Manor Park Hospital experienced similar problems. She met and married Mr Paul Stephenson during the boycott campaign.
- 4 The Department of the Bristol Medical Officer of Health, "The Size and Current Problems of the Immigrant Population in Bristol", a confidential paper (nd but c 1962) in Literature on Immigration, ACRO, 3525c. A Richmond with M Lyon, S Hale, R King, *Migration and Race Relations in an English City. A Study in Bristol* (Oxford 1973), pp48-56, 115.
- 5 The Rev Andrew Hake, interviewed 9 December 1985. Rev Hake was an assistant to the industrial adviser to the Bishop of Bristol until 1957. See also the Report from the Department of Public Health, "Maternal and Child Welfare Problems" (nd but c 1962) in Literature on Immigration ACRO, 3525c: "The majority of immigrant families live in one room in tenement houses let out to coloured families... The landlord is frequently a coloured man." See also the observation that "exploitation by undesirable landlords is the real problem in fading housing areas, not immigration per se", in Department of Public Health, "Environmental Problems" (nd but c. 1964) in Correspondence, loco cit, ACRO, 3402c. See also *Evening Post*, 6 February 1962, on activity of slum lords.
- 6 Owen Henry interview.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Carty interview.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Mr Roy Hackett, interviewed 19 November 1985.
- 11 Mr "John Garrett" and Mr "Tim Spring" (not their real names), interviewed 20 June 1985.
- 12 See Ken Pryce, *Endless Pressure* (London 1975), p84; Interviews with Messrs Owen Henry and "Will James" (not his real name) interviewed 10 February 1986, confirm this.
- 13 Interviews with Messrs "Garrett" and "Spring". This was not only a Bristolian attitude. See James Walvin, *Passage to Britain* (London 1984), p99. Owen Henry interview.
- 14 "Will James" interview. See also Answer of the Bristol Corporation Welfare Services to a question posed

- by the Association of Municipal Corporations (nd but c 1962) citing the very small minority of immigrants involved in prostitution, in Literature, loc cit. ACRO 3525c?
- 15 See note 1.
- 16 Jessie M Hood, "Second Report of the Colonial Liaison Officer to the Committee for the Welfare of Colonial Workers in Bristol" for 1 April 1957 to 30 September 1958 in Correspondence ACRO, 3402. M Banton, "The Influence of Colonial Status upon Black-White Relations in England. 1948-58", *Sociology*, vol 17 no 4, p554. Thanks to M Banton for this reference.
- 17 P Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London 1984), pp376-378. Keesey's Contemporary Archives, 4-11 October 1958, p16428. "Many coloured immigrants had managed to save enough to buy small houses on mortgage, a fact which was resented by homeless whites, and in some cases had attempted to evict white tenants. Friendships between white girls and coloured men were also resented, especially by the younger white men; and a few coloured men in both London and Nottingham were known to be living on the immoral earnings of white girls. In Nottingham a local recession had led to short-time working in certain industries and had aroused fears of coloured competition for jobs among unskilled workers, although in fact the proportion of coloured people among the unemployed...was extremely high."
- 18 Owen Henry interview.
- 19 Jessie Hood, op cit.
- 20 "Lecture for the Extra-Mural Dept" (of the University of Bristol), by the (unnamed) Research Assistant of Dr A H Richmond, probably Michael Lyon, 5 December 1966, in Literature, ACRO, 3525c. The lecture cites the situation in St Paul's in 1961.
- 21 M Dresser, "People's Housing in Bristol 1880-1939", in I Bild, ed, *Bristol's Other History* (Bristol, 1983).
- 22 Reply of the Bristol Corporation Welfare Services, op cit; A Richmond, M Lyon, et alia, *Migration and Race Relations*, op cit, p95, which records a petition from residents from Martin St, Alfred St, Princes St and Union Street, St Paul's, "protesting against disorderly conduct in several houses and calling for prostitution to be stopped". See also letter to the EP, 9 May 1963: "...an argument often used by some people is that wherever West Indian people go we find 'another City Road';" also Letter from P Brain, EP, 2 May 1963. As late as 1968, 61 percent of St Paul's residents were white, E J B Rose et alia, *Colour and Citizenship* (Oxford 1968), p255.
- 23 "Environmental Problems", op cit; Jessie Hood, op cit; Roy Hackett interview.
- 24 "Letter to Town Clerk from H C W Harris of the Housing Department", 8 Oct 1962, in Correspondence, ACRO, 3402c; see also notes 24 and 27.
- 25 EP, 2 Nov 1961.
- 26 "Notes of a Meeting Regarding the Community Development of West Indians in Bristol Held in the Town Clerk's Office", 14 May 1959, in Correspondence ACRO, 3525c. "Mr Muirhead [Community Relations Officer for the South of England] stated that in general West Indians complained that they had not been

- welcomed at churches." Miss Jessie Hood notified the Bristol Council of Christian Churches of this state of affairs but the "several offers of help which resulted" came only "from all-white parishes".
- 27 Jessie Hood, op cit.
 - 28 Owen Henry and Roy Hackett interviews.
 - 29 Jessie Hood, op cit. 1955 was the year the TUC passed a resolution against racial discrimination, R Miles and A Phizacklea, *The TUC and Commonwealth Legislation*, Social Science Research Council Working Paper on Ethnic Relations, 1975. But in that same year the Transport and General Workers' Union Biennial Delegate Conference reportedly called for stricter controls on foreign immigration; this call was repeated by the conference in 1957 where a resolution for tighter controls on foreign labour, "particularly West Indians", was passed. I am indebted to Bill Murray for this reference.
 - 30 J Hood, op cit. This assertion is corroborated by Ald H Hennessey's accusation in *EP*, 2 May 1963, that the union colluded in a colour bar on the buses, and references to the ballot in *The Daily Sketch* 8 May 1963, p6; John Morgan, "Colour Bar, Bristol Fashion", *New Statesman*, 10 May 1963, p708 (Bristol) T and GWU in *EP*, 2 May 1963, p18.
 - 31 *EP*, 2 May 1963.
 - 32 A Hake interview.
 - 33 Ibid. It is perhaps significant that at a conference on the "Welfare of the Colonial Worker in Bristol" held on 1 November 1957, the chairman convening the conference, Rev John Ragg of Bristol's Committee for the Welfare of Colonial Workers, deplored on behalf of his committee "the poor response from employers' representations and the complete lack of response from trade union representatives who were invited to attend the conference."
 - 34 Interview with Mr Don Bateman, 30 April 1985.
 - 35 *EP*, 31 October 1961; 1 Nov 1961. The first of these articles was by George Gardiner; reportedly the same man was later the Tory MP and Monday Club member.
 - 36 *EP*, 2 Nov 1961.
 - 37 *EP*, 1 Nov 1961.
 - 38 Ibid.
 - 39 Ibid.
 - 40 Roy Hackett interview. See also *Bristol Consumer*, a short lived magazine of the Bristol Consumer Group, 1962, Avon County Reference Library, B24005: in a "Report of an Investigation of Complaints about the city services of the Bristol Omnibus Company", it was stated, "Many complaints could be put down to shortage of crews... It is also true that other areas have the same trouble... London and Nottingham etc have met it by employing coloured crews. (It is noteworthy that no writers objected to coloured crews and several praised them.)"
 - 41 Ibid. O Henry interview.
 - 42 Biographical details gleaned from interviews with Mr Paul Stephenson 20 January 1985, 9 June 1985 and *The Guardian*, 27 Feb 1964. I am indebted to Mr Stephenson for the loan of his collection of newspaper cuttings of the boycott and related matters and for letting me view his tape of a 1983 HTV programme commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Bristol bus dispute. Miss Judith Tang, a sixth

- former at Hanham High School, Bristol, in 1986, also interviewed Mr Stephenson and I have also used her tape of the interview which she kindly lent me. Paul Stephenson was financed by a Rowntree Grant, Miss Hood by a Dulverton Grant. One wonders whether either would have been hired had the council had to finance the posts itself.
- 43 O Henry interview.
- 44 *EP*, 1 May 1963.
- 45 Paul Stephenson interview. Stephenson is, of course, correct. The first act making racial segregation in public places or accommodation unlawful was passed in 1965; the first act making racial discrimination in employment unlawful was passed in 1968.
- 46 *EP*, 1 May 1963, p1.
- 47 R Hackett interview.
- 48 (Bristol Corporation) Council Minutes, 13 Feb 1962, p227. See also letter alluding to the bar by R Dent in *EP*, date?, 1962, p16. Minutes of the Joint Transport Committee (Bristol Corporation), 15 March 1962, para. 1371.
- 49 *Ibid*.
- 50 *Ibid*. The Council members of the Joint Transport Committee included Ald Stevenson (no relation). Ald Hennessey, Ald Cann; Mr Abrams, Mr Walker, Mr Jones, Reserve—Ald Ford.
- 51 *EP*, 30 April 1963.
- 52 *Ibid*.
- 53 *Ibid*.
- 54 *Ibid*.
- 55 *EP*, 1 May 1963. See *The Times*, 3 May 1963, p11.
- 56 Interview with Mr Jack Hodge, 6 May 1985. Mr Hodge was, at the time of the interview, Regional 57. Trade Group Secretary for the whole of the Passenger Section of the T and GWU Western and South Wales Region. He has recently retired.
- 57 Interview with Mr Ron Nethercott, South Western Regional Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, 12 September 1985.
- 58 "From time to time the company's ruling has been challenged and it is generally well known but the arrival of Mr Stephenson with strong feelings and organising abilities has led to more heat than is usual in Bristol controversies"—from *The Times*, 3 May 1963, p1. See Nethercott's statement in *EP*, 1 November 1961.
- 59 R Nethercott, Interview. Later in the interview Mr Nethercott denied he had stated Mr Coxwell said his members did not want to work with "coloured" people. But the tape of the interview confirms that he did originally say this.
- 60 Both Owen Henry and Paul Stephenson attest to this. For more information on the singular career of this Afro-American activist deported to Britain during the McCarthy era, see A Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (London 1982), pp164-171; B Bryan, S Dadzie and S Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London 1985), pp135-139; B Johnson, "I think of my mother", *Notes on The Life and Times of Claudia Jones* (Karia Press, London 1984).
- 61 *Western Daily Press*, 2 May 1963; *The Times*, 3 May 1963, p4; *The Gleaner* (Kingston, Jamaica), 3 May 1963, p1.
- 62 *WDP*, 2 May 1963.
- 63 *EP*, 2 May 1963; *WDP*, 2 May 1963.
- 64 Nethercott said of the protest: "It is like having your hands tied behind your back and then being punched in the face, I just don't like it", in *EP*,

- 2 May 1963; WDP, 2 May 1961.
- 65 EP, 2 May 1963.
- 66 EP, 2 May 1963; 1 May 1963; WDP, 2 May 1963.
- 67 WDP, 3 May 1963; EP, 2 May 1963. The representatives of the Jamaican High Commissioner were Mr Hosford Scott and Mr H St Clair MacKenzie. They also met with Ian Patey, and with Leslie of the Bristol Labour Party, along with "several University lecturers".
- 68 EP, 2 May 1963.
- 69 WDP, 2 May 1963.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 *The Gleaner*, 3 May 1963.
- 72 EP, 2 May 1963.
- 73 WDP, 3 May 1963; Stan Awberry (Labour MP for Bristol Central) first attempted to table a motion on the dispute. Awberry was a member and former organiser of the Transport and General Workers' Union. See also EP, 2 May 1963; *The Times*, 3 May 1963, p11.
- 74 EP, 2 May 1963; WDP, 3 May 1963.
- 75 WDP, 3 May 1963.
- 76 EP, 1 May 1963, 2 May 1963.
- 77 EP, 2 May 1963.
- 78 EP, 3 May 1963, p1.
- 79 WDP, 1 May 1963, p6.
- 80 EP, 1 May 1963, p18, see P Stephenson's comparison of Bristol with Little Rock in WDP, 3 May 1963.
- 81 Both the BBC and the HTV covered the story.
- 82 Nethercott interview.
- 83 Stephenson and Hackett interviews.
- 84 EP, 4 May 1963; see also Stephenson collection for photograph of Gaskin and Stephenson.
- 85 EP, 4 May 1963.
- 86 EP, 3 May 1963; WDP, 4 May 1963.
- 87 Nethercott interview.
- 88 WDP, 4 May 1963, p1.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Dr Tomkin's pronouncements are in EP, 6 May 1963. Interestingly, both Nethercott and Stephenson saw the Bishop as their personal friend, but neither were particularly pleased about the public support he gave them during this dispute.
- 92 Nethercott interview; undated cutting from the *Daily Herald* but probably 4 May 1963. In Stephenson collection; Stephenson interview; EP, 12 June 1963.
- 93 Report from the High Court of Justice; Queen's Bench Division—Stephenson v Odhams Press and Another in *The Times* (nd, but 1965); plus local press cuttings on case, undated in Stephenson collection; Interviews with Nethercott and Stephenson.
- 94 Don Bateman interview.
- 95 *The Gleaner*, 6 May 1963, p1.
- 96 P Carty interview; see also the *Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1963, p19; *The Times*, 6 May 1963, p8.; EP, 6 May 1963.
- 97 Stephenson and Hackett interviews.
- 98 "W James" interviews.
- 99 John Morgan, "Colour Bar Bristol Fashion", op cit; Hackett, Henry, Stephenson, Nethercott interviews.
- 100 *The Times*, 6 May 1963, p8.
- 101 *The Times*, 7 May 1963, p5. The critic was Mr Robert Davidson, an adviser on immigrants to the Jamaican High Commissioner.
- 102 EP, 6 May 1963; *The Times*, 7 May 1963.
- 103 WDP, 6 May 1963, p7.
- 104 EP, 6 May 1963, p1.; *The Times*, 7 May 1963, p5.; EP, 7 May 1963; *The Gleaner*, 7 May 1963, p2.
- 105 WDP, 7 May 1963.
- 106 John Morgan, "Colour Bar, Bristol Fashion", op cit.
- 107 See G Howat, *Learie Constantine* (London 1975), p187.

- 108 *The Gleaner*, 8 May 1963, p2.
- 109 *The Gleaner*, 11 May 1963, p1; 12 May 1963; 13 May 1963; 14 May 1963.
- 110 *WDP*, 8 May 1963, p1; *EP*, 8 May 1963; *The Times*, 8 May 1963, p12.
- 111 *EP*, 8 May 1963.
- 112 *The Daily Sketch*, 8 May 1963, p6.
- 113 John Morgan, "Colour Bar, Bristol Fashion", op cit.
- 114 *WDP*, 1 May 1963; *EP*, 1 Nov 1961, 30 April 1963; Hodge interview, Patey interviewed in HTV tape, 1983 loco cif.
- 115 *The Times*, 7 May 1963, p12.
- 116 *The Times*, 8 May 1963, p12.
- 117 *EP*, 8 May 1963; See Hansard (Commons Proceedings), 1962-3, vol 670, pp 97-100; 15 May 1963, vol 677, written answers, pp149-150.
- 118 *WDP*, 7 May 1963.
- 119 Cited in *The Gleaner*, 8 May 1963, p2.
- 120 *The Times*, 7 May 1963, p13.
- 121 Ibid.
- 122 *The Times*, Letter from Lord Walston, 9 May 1963, p13. See also Hansard, 15 May 1963, vol 677, written answers, pp149-150, where the Tory Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples, was able to deny the need for legislation against racial discrimination by citing the way in which the Transport Holding Company had dealt with its Bristol subsidiary!
- 123 *WDP*, 14 May 1963.
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 Ibid.
- 126 *EP*, 14 May 1963.
- 127 The "Russian waiters" remark was made by a labour activist whose name will not be cited for obvious reasons. The Communist organiser cited was Mr Joe Berry, *WDP*, 11 May 1963.
- 128 Garrett interview.
- 129 Ibid.
- 130 Ibid. See also Anon, *The History of the Bristol Omnibus Co Ltd*, Avon County Reference Library, B267704; *WDP*, 3 May 1963. The *WDP* report maintains that the above mentioned option came up in 1935. Nationalisation in 1949 gave the British Transport Commission a controlling interest in Bristol Omnibus Company. In January 1963 the commission was dissolved and "control passed to the Transport Holding Company".
- 131 Group interview with retired drivers and conductors of the Bristol Omnibus Company, 11 June 1985.
- 132 J Hodge interview.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 R Nethercott interview; For Jack Jones's view, see *Workers Against Racism: The Roots of Racism* (London 1985), p63.
- 135 *EP*, 30 April 1963, p1; "Garrett" interview.
- 136 J Hodge interview.
- 137 Jim Cheek, interviewed along with Jack Hodge, 7 May 1985.
- 138 *EP*, 16 May 1963.
- 139 R Nethercott interview.
- 140 Hansard (Commons Proceedings), 1961-2, vol 648, pp982-988. For an interesting assessment of the reluctance of many English people to face up to the existence of racism, see M and A Durnmeett, "The role of Government in Britain's Racial Crisis", in C Husband, ed, *Race in Britain* (London 1982), p101. See M Barker, *The New Racism* (London 1983) for a wider definition of racism.
- 141 "Mr and Mrs Grey" (not their real names) interviewed 1 November 1985. The survey conducted by A Richmond et alia supports my contention that in Bristol racism, as well as economic worries,

- local pride and an intolerance of cultural diversity, was behind white Bristolians' dislike of immigrants—see Richmond et alia, op cit, chapter 10.
- 142 “W James” interview.
- 143 8144 N Pronay, “British Newsreel in the 1930s, (part two) their Policies and Impact”, *History* (1972) vol 57, p66.
- 145 R Nethercott interview. See Hilda Jennings, *Societies in the Making* (Bristol 1954).
- 146 Bristol BroadSides, *Barton Hill Remembers* (Bristol 1983); Leonard Veer, *Bedminster Between the Wars* (Bristol 1985); Cecil Pope, *A Family in St Paul’s 1920-1940* (Bristol 1985); Pope remembers that there was no “colour problem” perhaps because there was only one black family, the St Clair family (the wife appears to have been English, the husband West Indian).
- 147 E J B Rose et alia, *Colour and Citizenship* (Oxford 1969), p429, for the Victorian values reportedly predominating in the first generation West Indian community in Bristol. For Caribbean underdevelopment, see note 190.
- 148 EP, 4 May 1963. See EP, 1 May 1963, 3 May 1963, 7 May 1963, 8 May 1963, 9 May 1963, 14 May 1963; 30 August 1963. See also WDP, 1 May 1963, 8 May 1963, 9 May 1963 and 16 May 1963.
- 149 EP, 4 May 1963.
- 150 EP, 9 May 1963.
- 151 EP, 9 May 1963.
- 152 EP, 8 May 1963.
- 153 EP, 4 May 1963.
- 154 EP, 9 May 1963.
- 155 EP, 9 May 1963; see other letters on commuting theme in the same issue; see also WDP, 3 May 1963, 4 May 1963, 6 May 1963, 14 May 1963 and 16 May 1963 for letters on similar theme.
- 156 EP, 7 May 1963; see also EP, 9 May 1963.
- 157 EP, ? May 1963.
- 158 EP, 8 May 1963, 4 May 1963.
- 159 EP, 4 May 1963, 8 May 1963, 9 May 1963.
- 160 EP, 9 May 1963.
- 161 EP, 11 May 1963; WDP, 11 May 1963.
- 162 See the letter signed by Hennessy, St John Read, Fenner Brockway, Philip Whiting, J Malos, S D M McConville, H D Dickinson and Paul Stephenson in EP, 1 May 1963; Letters from Flowers and Cllr Boss also in same issue; WDP, 11 May 1963.
- 163 See EP, 2 May 1963; WDP, 11 May 1963.
- 164 EP, 2 May 1963. It is not known how many people eventually signed the petition but the bus crews who used the Hartcliffe Community Canteen were among the first 200 to sign.
- 165 Joan Smith, “Labour Tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool”, *History Workshop*, 17 (Spring 1984), pp32 ff.
- 166 EP, 1 May 1963, see letter from Knowle, Bristol, signed “Bias”.
- 167 EP, 4 May 1963.
- 168 EP, 28 August 1963.
- 169 Ibid; WDP, 29 August 1963. See also *Guardian*, cutting 27 August 1963, in Stephenson collection.
- 170 EP, 28 August 1963.
- 171 Ibid.
- 172 *The Guardian*, 29 August 1963; *Daily Express*, 29 August 1963; *Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 1963, all cuttings from Stephenson collection.
- 173 EP, 28 August 1963.
- 174 WDP, 29 August 1963; EP, 30 August 1963.
- 175 EP, 28 August 1963. Yet *The Guardian*, 29 August 1963, said neither Patey or Coxwell were

- "very explicit" about the busmen's reaction: "Mr Patey would make no comment. He did point out that there are certain people who have very strong views on this question." Yet *The Guardian* too observed the proposal to end the bar was received with "little dissension" by the 500 employees voting.
- 176 *EP*, 28 August 1963.
- 177 I have not named the two very reliable sources who gave me this information for obvious reasons. It is worth pointing out that a racial quota had been negotiated by TGWU officials in Manchester as early as 1948.
- 178 "The Size and Current Problem of the Immigrant Population in Bristol", op cit, ACRO 3525c.
- 179 *EP*, 28 August 1963.
- 180 *Ibid*; *Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 1963.
- 181 Mr Raghbir Singh interviewed 13 May 1985; *WDP*, 17 September 1963, *EP*, 17 September 1963. 182.
- 182 D Beetham, *Transport and Turbans: A Comprehensive Study in Local Politics* (Oxford 1970), pp23 ff.
- 183 *WDP*, 17 September 1963.
- 184 *WDP*, 18 September 1963.
- 185 D Beetham, op cit, pp23-36 and 90-98.
- 186 For the most part, the Conservatives kept their heads down during the dispute, but see the letter from the convenor of the Bristol Bow Group in *EP*, 4 May 1963, and the remarks of the "Citizen" Councillor in *WDP*, 11 May 1963.
- 187 I have made this statement on the basis of my study of Bristol's Council Minutes for the period, 1958-63. Only twice was reference made to racial discrimination—these being in questions raised by Councillors Bill Graves and Mr Langham. The question raised by Cllr Graves was about links with South Africa, BCM, 1958-59, p263.
- 188 J Stewart, "Local Colour", *New Statesman*, 8 May 1964. See *Output*, a short-lived journal produced by the New Bristol Group, whose members included Tony Benn—Avon Reference Library, B 24873.
- 189 *Arrowsmith's Dictionary of Bristol* (Bristol 1906), p232.
- 190 *Arrowsmith's Dictionary of Bristol*, p232; P M Sherlock, *West Indian Nations, a New History* (Jamaica 1973), pp173, 184-185.
- 191 See J Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism* (Oxford 1984).
- 192 "It will be demonstrated again and again [that] white native workers [on London buses] were very much concerned with considerations of status in their relationship with coloured immigrants and that some accorded the coloured immigrant fewer rights because of his colour." Quoted from D Brooks, *Race and Labour in London Transport* (Oxford 1975), p5. See also R Miles and A Phizacklea, eds, *Racism and Political Action* (London 1985), pp96-97.
- 193 Howat, op cit, p189.

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