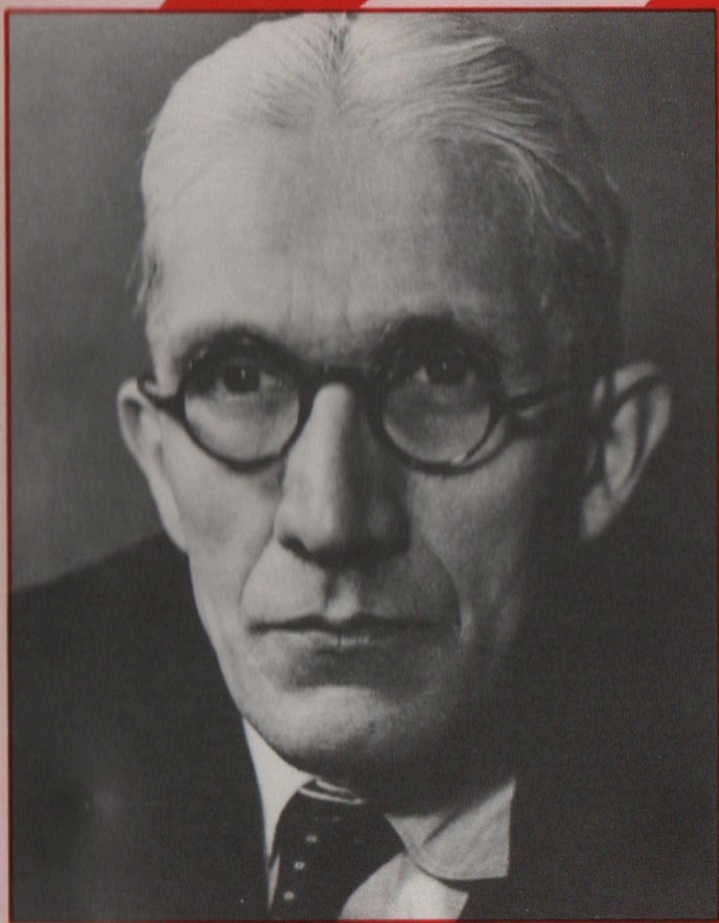


THE LIFE AND WORK OF RAJANI PALME DUTT (1896-1974)



TUESDAY 8th APRIL 1986 to 25th APRIL 1986
AT THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES
(UNIVERSITY OF LONDON) MALET STREET LONDON WC1

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THE LIFE AND WORK OF RAJANI PALME DUTT

PERVAIZ NAZIR

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

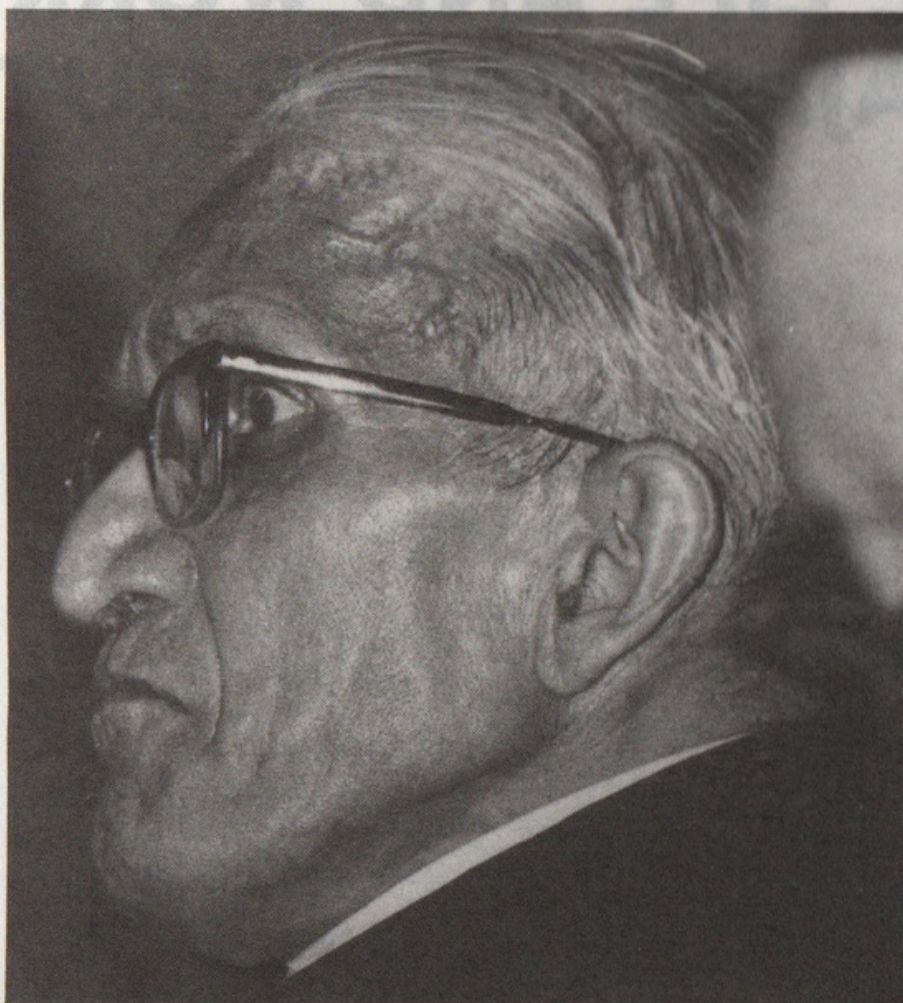
Thanks are due to Avtar Brah for initially suggesting the idea of an Exhibition on the life and work of Rajani Dutt. This coincided with my ongoing research interest on the nationalities question in South Asia on which Dutt has made such an important contribution. Thanks also to Parminder Vir of the GLC Race Equality Unit for her support and encouragement of the project; and to Betty Reed, George Matthews and Francis King for their help and co-operation in making available the material on Dutt in the CPGB's Library; to Vishnu Sharma, Nicola Seyd, Ray Bolster and the *Morning Star* for their help and interest in this project.

**THE RAJANI PALME DUTT EXHIBITION WAS
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I THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RAJANI PALME DUTT (1896-1974)

INTRODUCTION

Rajani Palme Dutt must rank amongst the most outstanding progressive political figures of this century. And yet surprisingly – or perhaps not so surprisingly – given the racism and political predilections of our times, Dutt remains relatively obscure to the public in Britain though he is better known internationally and in India.

A founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and one of its leading theoreticians for several decades he held the position of Vice-Chairman of the Party and Head of its International Section. R. P. Dutt's life and work spanned five decades during which he influenced a great many people through his writings, his editorship of *Labour Monthly* and his political activity. He figured in many controversies and entered into conflict with a host of adversaries, some of which we discuss below.

The brief sketch of Dutt's life and works that follows is not at all a substitute for a full-fledged biography which at present does not exist; we merely hope to redress the balance of his relative obscurity by focussing on some aspects of his life and work. Nor is this pamphlet intended to eulogise Dutt's life and work – on the contrary we hope to present an objective but sympathetic account of his life and work.

Of course Dutt lived during some very crucial years of the twentieth century and it is the social, political, economic and ideological conditions in which he lived that need to be examined – for it is difficult to extricate Dutt – or any individual from the context in which he/she lives, though no individual is reducible to those conditions alone. So that whilst Dutt, as a third world person lived in an era of rampant imperialism, of the most oppressive and exploitative phases of capitalism as well as the rise of fascism and an ubiquitous racism; and was a witness to two World Wars – his writings and works were both a response to and yet transcended these conditions, in the sense that whilst his analysis of the social conditions of Britain, India, the world even, were premised on existing concrete realities, yet they offered a prognosis for the future world which existed only in potential.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Rajani Palme Dutt was born at Cambridge in 1896, the son of Upendra Krishina Dutt, a surgeon and member of a prominent Indian family; his mother Anna Palme was a Swedish writer (R. P. Dutt and the recently assassinated Prime Minister of Sweden Mr Olof Palme were first cousins).

Dutt was educated at Perse School, Cambridge and from there he went on a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, where he joined the Independent Labour Party in 1914. His conflicts with authority started early when at the beginning of 3

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the First World War he refused to be conscripted to the army to fight an imperialist war on the grounds that he was a Socialist war register. His appearance in a Military Tribunal resulted in acquittal on the grounds that he was an 'Anglo-Indian'!

Dutt's appeal against this decision on the grounds that he was liable to conscription because he was a British subject resulted in his being imprisoned in 1916 for six months in gaol.

He was allowed to return to Oxford but was expelled in 1917 for political activity: there was violence at a meeting on Socialism in which he supported the Bolsheviks against the Kerensky Government. Later Dutt was permitted to sit for the examinations which he passed with First Class Honours in Classics getting 12 alphas out of 12.

Rajani Dutt along with his brother Clemens who was also at Oxford came under close scrutiny of the British establishments. Whilst all politically active Indian students were under surveillance by the authorities at that time, the Dutt brothers were to be watched even more closely. In 1919 the Vice-Chancellor wrote to Lord Curzon the Foreign Secretary that 'they are men of extraordinary ability and have quite got control of the Socialist Club here, though they never appear in public. In my opinion they ought to be watched closely.'

In 1919 Dutt began work in the labour movement; from 1919 to 1922 he was international secretary of the Labour Research Department then connected with the Labour Party. Dutt was one of the foundation members of the British Communist Party in August 1920, and was for long the Party's Vice-Chairman. In July 1921 he started the theoretical journal, *Labour Monthly*, which he edited for more than fifty years.

He was elected to the Central Committee and the Politbureau of the British Communist Party in 1922 and he served on these bodies till about 1965.

From 1936 to 1938 he was editor of the *Daily Worker*. Dutt stood as Parliamentary Candidate for the Communist Party in Sparkbrook in 1945 and in Woolwich East in 1950, but failed to get elected.

Dutt was associated with and had great influence on British and Indian (and other third world) radicals. From the inception of the Communist Party of India in 1925 he was its major ideologue and theoretical guide. He first visited India in 1946 (he was not allowed there by the British before this), when he covered the Cabinet Mission for the *Daily Worker*. He was a prolific writer who wrote sixteen wrote sixteen books and hundreds of articles and pamphlets, some of which we discuss in the sections that follow. In 1924 Dutt married Salme Murrick, a well-known writer of poetry and literature. She died in 1964, they had no children. In the later years of his life Dutt was afflicted by ill-health which rendered him less active than he might have been, but he still kept writing. He died in London on 20 December 1974.

In the sections that follow we present briefly some salient features of Dutt's life and work and the socio-economic and political ideological context in which he lived.

As a politically active Marxist, Dutt involved himself in and wrote about an enormously wide range of subjects and issues: on political economy, aesthetics, art and literature, philosophy, on Marxist Methodology, race, fascism, on the politics of Britain and the West, and so on. Above all he was concerned with the national and colonial questions and the freeing of colonies, particularly India whose independence he saw as being of crucial significance for the struggle for

independence of other colonized nations. That these questions were of particular interest to Dutt is understandable given that the struggles for national independence were at the forefront of the political agenda, from the First World War to the late 1950s, the period during which Dutt himself was most energetically active.

What follows is not a strictly chronological account of Dutt's work; instead we have concentrated on aspects of his work some of which are relatively well-known such as his work on colonial political economy and India, and others which are obscure and little known to the public, for example, his activities and writing on racism in Britain. The section on some early Asian organisations and activists in Britain is included for this fits in with Dutt's own presence in Britain and the colonial connection underlying this; this fits in too with Dutt's interest in seeing a free India a goal which was also pursued with vigour by other early South Asian activists and organisations in Britain.

II THE CONTEXT

It is necessary to briefly describe the socio-economic and political conditions in Britain and its colonies in order to situate Dutt's life and work in its proper and meaningful context.

In the years after the First World War there was widespread belief that the depression then ensuing in the primary exporting industries and sustained labour unrest that ultimately led to the 1926 General Strike were temporary phenomena, an effect of the post-war dislocation of the Western economies. It was believed that this period of turbulence and unrest would phase out as production and trade and commerce resumed their normal activity. There was some glimmer of this in the late 1920s and especially in America which had technologically and in prosperity surged forward, buttressing the notion that Karl Marx's predictions had been refuted by Taylorism and Henry Ford.

This illusion was short lived. The crash of the New York Stock Market in 1929 engulfed America and had serious consequences for the rest of the world also, both industrialised and under-developed.

Unemployment in Britain rose precipitously with almost three million without jobs in 1933, or nearly 25 per cent of the insured workforce. The ensuing world crisis and the devastating decline in export markets made it abundantly clear that the foundations of British economic strength so dependent on international financial and trading connections had been fatally impaired. This economic and social catastrophe, of course, had differential effects on the various socio-economic strata of British and colonial societies: there was still abundance in the midst of great want.

In spite of the economic crisis Britain still held a central place in the world market, and possessed the greatest empire hitherto known to humanity. But here too, as we shall see in some detail later, cracks were beginning to appear – the nationalist struggles had begun to erode and wear away Britain's implacable imperial armour. The Empire was enormous: about five hundred million 5

people, majority of whom (430 million) were subject colonial peoples. And of these about 350 million were in India. These colonies were a great source of strength for Britain: they possessed immense wealth in the form of human labour and raw materials and large protected markets for Britain's industrial production, as well as places where ambitious individuals could make lucrative careers and live a lifestyle denied to them in Britain.

It has generally been agreed by many that the colonies enabled Britain to import food and raw materials cheaply and that this was one of the main factors which enabled the dominant classes in Britain to avoid a direct conflict with its own proletariat.

Be that as it may, the early 1930s meant for almost all sections of the British working classes a collapse of the whole economic relations they were familiar with; they were faced with the contradictions of the capitalist system: one of the most affluent countries in the world was totally unable to provide large numbers of its citizens with any way of earning a livelihood.

These were the conditions that led to an upsurge of working class militancy, along with an increasing number of middle class and professional people who felt insecure in such an environment, to look favourably towards a planned economy. Great interest was shown in the planned economic development of this Soviet Union and the state intervention in the US economy, namely Roosevelt's New Deal.

In spite of the hardships suffered by the masses the existing trade union leadership and labour movement had little to offer in the way of radical and fundamental structural transformation of society – to do away with the contradictions that inhere in capitalist social economic relations.

Any significant movements of protest and opposition by those out of work, the industrial workers, the tenants, the anti-fascists in the east end of London, began, on the whole, on the periphery of the established official structures of the labour movement; very often from localised unofficial and frequently banned organisations.

Instead of the TUC and national officials it was the under- or non-unionized areas of the Midlands and the South East as well as the shop stewards and trades councils who created the basis for the great crucial strategic advances in industrial and political organisations in the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties. It should be noted, however, that insofar as industrial conflict is concerned the 1920s had been an era of major industrial conflicts, in the mining industry, in engineering, textiles, railways and shipbuilding. By contrast in the 1930s there were in comparison few large-scale strikes; for example only in 1932 in the cotton strike was there widespread industrial conflict.

As we have said above, the imperial heritage of British capitalism gave the dominant classes during the 1930s the flexibility and leverage to compromise under pressure from working class and other progressive forces in Britain, a position denied to the dominant classes of Germany, Japan or Italy.

Britain's privileged position, however, was being strongly challenged: firstly by the rivalry of fast advancing capitalist powers, mainly the USA, Germany, Japan and Italy. Britain's supreme position was also being eroded by increasingly militant nationalist movements in the colonies: in the Middle East, in South-East Asia, in China and most importantly in India, the linchpin of Britain's colonial system. Here the Congress Party, formed in 1885, as well as the Communist Party and the Muslim League were agitating in a variety of different ways for Indian

Independence. The Indian question is closely linked with Dutt's political life and we shall have more to say on this in the sections on India and Dutt's major works.

THE CULTURAL MILIEU

The second and third decades of this century witnessed a new development in Britain's and India's cultural life: the radicalisation of art, science and literature. In the 1930s in Britain, for example, economists and scientists began to discuss, investigate and connect in a systematic way, the interface between the problems of social planning and application of science; these included among others, J. D. Bernal, Joseph Needham, Hyman Levy, Patrick Blackett, J. B. S. Haldane, C. P. Snow, Lancelot Hogben and Julian Huxley among others. Similar new developments and radicalisation occurred in art criticism: the work of Anthony Blunt and F. Klingender. An aspect of this trend is reflected at the international level with the formation of the Artists International in 1933 by groups of individuals who as artists understood the political implications of their work.

In India progressive writers and scientists had also come to realize the social and political implications of their work, especially in the mid-1920s onwards. These disparate groups and individuals organised themselves as the All-India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) at a Conference held in Lucknow in 1935. Among its members were Prem Chand, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore, S. S. Chauhan and Ram Chatterjee. This organisation was to play a tremendous role in supporting and propagating progressive trends in Indian Cultural and literary life, as well as internationally. For example at the sixth AIPWA Conference a resolution was passed condemning the United States 'which seeks to smother the voices of Paul Robeson and Howard Fast'.

In Britain the Left Book Club was founded in 1936 by Victor Gollancz, which for the first time was supported by a mass readership on a wide spectrum of topics: R. P. Dutt's *India Today*, Salvemini's work on fascism, John Strachey's *The Theory and Practice of Socialism*, Emile Burns' *A Handbook of Marxism*, G. D. H Coles' *Condition of Britain*, Huberman's *Mans Worldly Goods*, Hanington's *Problem of the Distressed Areas* and so on.

This then was the context, the matrix, political economic, literary and cultural in which Dutt emerged as one of the foremost Marxist intellectuals and political activists of the twentieth century.

III

MAJOR WORKS

Dutt is the author of sixteen books and numerous articles in British, Indian and other national and international newspapers and journals. A comprehensive analysis of his works is not possible here, though a review of a small selection of his most influential works is in order. Among his better known publications are: *The Two Internationals* (1920), *Modern India* (1926), *Socialism and the Living Wage* (1927), *Lenin* (1933), *Fascism and Social Revolution* (1934), 7

World Politics 1918-36 (1936), Political and Social Doctrines of Communism, India Today (1940), Britain in the World Front (1942), Crisis of Britain and the British Empire (1953), India Today and Tomorrow (1956), Britain's Crisis of Empire (1949), The International, (1964) Whither China? (1967).

In his first book *The Two Internationals*, Dutt provided, for the benefit of the workers of advanced capitalist countries the analysis of problems that colonialism and imperialism bestowed on the colonies, the misery and degradation as well as the oppressive and undemocratic forces that emanated directly from imperialism. As we have seen and as we shall see further this theme is a recurring one in Dutt's work.

It was the publication of Dutt's *Modern India* in 1926 that established his credentials as the foremost authority on India. The book deals with the Indian socio-economic formation and the various socio-economic and political tendencies that were operating there as a result of the development of capitalism in that country. Here, for the first time he discussed systematically the strategy and tactics of the anti-colonial struggles, not only in India, but in their wider implications elsewhere in the colonial world.

In *Fascism and Social Revolution* Dutt provided a Marxian analysis of the rise of fascism as a socio-economic and political phenomena and its concrete manifestation in Germany, Italy and Austria. In the fight against the menace of fascism, Dutt wrote, there should be a united front of both the proletarian and social democratic forces.

The roots of fascism Dutt pointed out are to be sought in the period of a decaying imperialism:

'It is this culminating stage of capitalism that we are at present living through the stage of imperialism or capitalism in decay, and, more particularly now since 1914, the stage of the general crisis of capitalism, or final phase within imperialism... (it is) an attempt to maintain decaying and degenerate capitalism by the most violent, savage means, by butchery of the revolutionary working masses, and by criminal wars...'

In the fight against fascism Dutt clearly shows the crucial role of the united front and criticized those socialist leaders who advocated a struggle against fascism as solely the prerogative of socialists.

In *World Politics* Dutt attempted an analysis of crisis, wars, revolutions and upheavals during the years 1918-1936. He showed how capitalism was smashing itself against the many internal contradictions which are the logical outcome of its own social organisation. These contradictions express themselves and appear in different forms, depending on the particular socio-economic structures out of which they emerge. One of the contradictions that Dutt emphasized during this period was how modern imperialist states, by raising ever higher the barriers of nationalism came into conflict with the industrial forces attempting to expand on an international scale. The process of capitalist accumulation and its concentration and centralization had led to an era of imperialist conflict and the clash of conflicting groups of finance-capital all in mutual antagonism over the division of the world.

Dutt suggested that this explained the unprecident growth of armaments during 1918-1936, a growth that outstripped all other sections of industry. This, however, does not ease the problem for it intensifies the already unequal and

lopsided structures of capitalist industrial expansion, creating even greater instability.

In the ascending crisis of capitalism the exploitation of workers is intensified and they are threatened in new and various ways. Unemployment increases and is further exacerbated by the drive towards rationalization which increases production but at the expense of a decrease in the number employed.

Britain's Crisis of Empire was published in 1949. In this book Dutt shows how the crisis of Britain and Western Europe is the crisis of the imperialist system, upon which the economy of these countries has been built up, and which was fast approaching bankruptcy. The 'crisis of empire' developed for two main reasons. Firstly it was an intrinsic feature of the present phase of the crisis of British capitalism, which had lost ground to USA and Germany. Secondly, since the strength of British capital was almost entirely based on ruthless exploitation of the countries and colonies of the empire, any jolt emanating from here had serious repercussions for Britain. And jolts there were plenty. Every phase and moment in the struggle of the colonial people for their liberation struck at the vitals of British capitalism. Particularly so in India, where not only the peasants and workers, but an indigenous bourgeoisie had developed under the shadow of and in opposition to British capital and had supplanted it in certain spheres of the economy, especially the cotton textile industry.

For Dutt the crisis of the 'colonial system' signified the undermining of the very basis of British imperialism, and of all that, remarked Dutt scornfully, collectively known as 'Western civilisation'. Dutt proceeded to show how in an endeavour to prevent the empire from disintegrating into pieces under the impact of the national-liberation movements in the colonies, both the Labour and Conservative governments were waging continuous colonial wars and supporting anti-popular cliques and cabals everywhere in the colonial world, a task in which Britain was being increasingly aided by US imperialism. But, concluded Dutt, no devices, conspiracies or ruses could save the Anglo-American colonizers and the colonial system from final destruction:

The old road is finished. The new road must and will be found. The time has come when the great alternative has to be faced. Britain must either break with imperialism or go under. The ending of foreign domination and military interventionist adventures is not only indispensable in the interests of world democracy and peace and of the colonial people struggling for freedom. It is equally the life-and-death need of the British people.' (p. 166)

Finally *India Today* was published in 1940 though Dutt finished writing the draft in 1938. This book is dedicated to the memory of his father Upendra Krishna Dutt 'who taught me the beginnings of political understanding – to love the Indian people and all people struggling for freedom'. *India Today* is a classic and a precursor of many books written in the same genre on India. This book is even more remarkable for the fact that Dutt had not been to India as yet; as mentioned earlier he went to India for the first time in 1946 because he had not been allowed in earlier by the British authorities.

In *India Today* Dutt traces the various forms of the political struggle in India engendered by the complex configuration of the penetration of capital in its mercantile, industrial and finance form, whilst under the tutelage of repressive colonial domination.

He traces the rise of the Indian National Congress from its formation in 1885 to its vanguard role in the independence struggles in subsequent decades: struggles that were to lead to independence in 1947. The socio-economic and political conditions analysed in *India Today* epitomize for Dutt problems occurring in other parts of the colonial world also: 'India is a focus of all the conflicts and problems of the modern world situation. Here . . . the lowest levels of primitive economy, poverty and servitude exist alongside the most advanced forms . . .' These two structures and relationships of the most advanced and complex finance – capitalist exploitation and of the lowest levels of social misery and degradation are 'closely intertwined in a network of cause and effect'. In between the two levels exist a host of transitional and hybrid forms constitutive of old decomposing forces and new advancing forces. The solution to these several problems, Dutt continues, is contingent upon the issue of national liberation from imperialism and releasing the material and human forces immanent in India for the creation of a new India.

Dutt's devastating critique of most aspects of British colonial rule in India is as true today as it was in the late 1930s. Thus the failure under colonial rule to develop a capital goods industry, so crucial for an integrated economic development was no mere chance, but 'the sharpest reflection of the conditions of imperialist domination of a country. India is still wholly dependent on abroad for machinery'. Whilst the latter statement might only in part be true vis-a-vis present day India, the legacy bestowed by colonial rule on India and so vividly described in *India Today* lingers on in the poverty and destitution of the masses of the Indian people. In this book, Dutt compares the socio-economic achievements of the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union with India and shows how unfavourably the latter compares: 'In 1914 there were thirteen doctors in Tajikistan; in 1939 there were 440. In 1914 there were 100 hospital beds for the whole population; in 1939 there were 3,675. In India in 1930 there was 94 per cent illiteracy; in 1931 it was 92 per cent. In Tajikistan before the revolution only one half of 1 per cent of the population could read and write; by 1933 60 per cent could do so;' and so on for other indictors, showing the superiority of socialist development over capitalist development under conditions of colonial rule.

Whilst the national and colonial question has a centrality in Dutt's work, his writings are not limited to this subject. As we point out elsewhere in this pamphlet, Dutt wrote on an extremely wide range of topics on art, literature, philosophy; limitations imposed by shortage of space prevents us from going into any of these in any great detail. Interested readers may wish to pursue further study of Dutt's work from the lead we have provided in this volume.

IV LABOUR MONTHLY

'It is with a great deal of pleasure and pride that I congratulate you and your associates of the *Labour Monthly* and join hailing the 30th anniversary of that great publication. I have an abiding and deep regard for the many thousands of

honest and progressive working people in the mines, in the mills and factories, and on the docks of England whom I have come to know and love during the many, many times I have sung and spoken to them through the years. The *Labour Monthly* is the accurate mirror and mouthpiece of that nobler England whose great centuries-old tradition of freedom was created by the commoners, the workers of England. I know that they will not forsake that tradition. Whatever the pressures of reactionary American and America's British lackeys. I know that the *Labour Monthly* will continue to point the way and press the peoples advance toward the achievement of a world of peace and freedom for all people. My warmest regards.'

Paul Robeson in the *Labour Monthly*, August 1951

'The most famous Marxist Journal of the old pre-1914 era, the *Neue Zeit* edited by Kautsky . . . persisted physically in its fortieth year, after it had perished morally nine years earlier in 1914'.

R. P. Dutt, *Labour Monthly*, July 1961

Dutt founded the *Labour Monthly* in 1921 and was its editor for fifty years. He contributed to the journal almost continuously till his death; his last contribution was written two days before his death and published posthumously in January 1975. Variouslly subtitled as 'A Magazine of Left Unity' or 'Journal of International Labour', *Labour Monthly* was an independent left-wing journal whose readers and contributors were drawn from all spectrums of the left. Its influence was enormous both in Britain and abroad and its contributors over the years have included individuals whose contributions in their area of interest/struggle has been immense: Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, Compton Mackenzie and James Aldridge in the field of literature; Tom Mann, A. J. Cook, Herbert Smith and Jack Collins from the trade union movement; George Lansbury, Harry Pollitt, Robin Page Arnot, and Andrew Rothstein, G. D. H. Cole, Harold Laski, Fenner Brockway and Tony Benn from the political labour movement; Rutland Boughton, Alan Bush, Harry Francis in the musical field; Bernal and J. B. S. Haldane in the field of science; Saklatvala, Nehru, Gandhi, Nkrumah, Azikwe, Cheddi Jagan, Klara Zetkin, Henri Barbusse and N. Krupskaya in the international/third world field.

The circulation of the Journal fluctuated appreciably, linked to the political and social process of the period. For example, in January 1939 the circulation of the *Labour Monthly* was 7,000; 10,000 in January 1940; 20,000 in December 1940; 30,000 in May 1941; from 1942 to 1946 sales reached a figure of 55,000.

In the 1970s and until its last issue in 1980, circulation fluctuated around the 8,000 figure. Dutt's own reflection on *Labour Monthly's* (stated in the Golden Jubilee Souvenir) role was:

'to reflect and interpret the new conditions and currents, equally of the world situation in the international working class movement, and of the situation in Britain and the British movement in this wider context, to grapple with the new problems, and to seek to help chart the path to the fulfillment of the new tasks.

From the very first number to the present, we have maintained an open, consistent adherence to the principles of Marxism, class solidarity and internationalism in our editorial policy. From the very first number to the present we have combined the principled Marxist treatment of current issues with no less consistent campaigns for the broadest working class and progressive co-operation.'

And further Dutt continues:

'Why did we choose the title and continue to maintain the title *Labour Monthly*? Our choice was deliberate and it remains deliberate. Our journal seeks to serve the common interest of the labour movement. As the boundaries of the struggle have fluctuated in the battle of tendencies, with consequent shifts in the alignment and associations attached in popular usage to particular labels . . . in our opinion the grand old title of labour and the British Labour Movement is by no means the private property or monopoly of a particular sectional leadership or policy which is temporarily able to control the central machinery of the mass organisations of the working class, the presented majority of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the Co-operative Union, and the Labour Party, when that same sectional policy and leadership in reality serves in our opinion the interests of capitalism . . . We chose the title of *Labour Monthly* in 1921, when the present right-wing regime of bans and barriers had not yet been imposed, and when Communists and right-wingers still enjoyed equal constitutional rights in the Labour Party, which had been built up by the common effort of all sections. We have not deemed it necessary to alter that title through all the vicissitudes of these fifty years, because we believe that our journal has expressed the true interests, and the true destiny of the British Labour Movement and of Socialism in Britain.'

Under Dutt's general editorship the *Labour Monthly* played an active part in organising regular delegate conferences on a whole series of issues: for example the *Labour Monthly* conference for 'The United Front Against Fascism and War' in 1935; in 1937, the sixth *Labour Monthly* Conference on 'Problems of Unity and the People's Front', and a Conference convened by the *Labour Monthly* on 26 October 1958 in London, on 'Britain's Colonies and the Colour Bar' after the Notting Hill Riots of Summer 1958 which was attended by 166 delegates from 98 Trade Union, Co-operative and Labour organisations, of black workers organisations, as well as 150 visitors, with a total attendance of 316.

It has already been stated that Dutt was a regular contributor to the *Labour Monthly* ever since he founded the Journal in 1921; these contributions consisted of articles on all sorts of topics. In addition Dutt wrote regularly and consistently 'Notes of the Month', signed RPD, in which he offered an analysis and prognosis of ongoing economic, political and social processes as well as pronouncements of major policies and strategies. An example of the former: in the December 1921 issue of the journal a future Communist victory in China had been predicted; there was an exposure of Hitler first in 1923; in 1933 the journal attacked the Western policy of backing Hitler (while Churchill was praising Hitler and wishing Britain could have such a man in the hour of need).

And pronouncements of major policy changes: In March 1946, Dutt wrote his article 'India and Pakistan' where he announced the dramatic reversal of the previous Communist policy supporting the creation of Pakistan.

That the *Labour Monthly* had survived but that it might not in the future is implicit in Dutt's self-assessment in the July 1961 issue:

'In the modern press jungle, where the increasing cannibalism of monopoly . . . extends also to the lowly ranks of monthly periodical . . . even survival has become a phenomenon . . . of course in the general run of press annuals continuity over forty years is nothing remarkable. But the survival of a socialist journal, without wealthy backers or subsidies, over forty years is

less usual. The most famous Marxist journal of the old pre-1914 era, the *Neue Zeit* edited by Kantsky, founded in 1883, perished physically in its fortieth year, after it had perished morally nine years earlier in 1914.'

Labour Monthly was to survive another twenty years.

IV THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

A prominent leader of the British Communist Party who met Dutt in 1920 has remarked on the deep impression that Dutt had made on him 'with his revolutionary earnestness and theoretical clarity'. These two qualities as well as his immense erudition placed Dutt among the three top persons in the Party, along with W. Gallacher and Harry Pollitt. And it was largely because of these qualities that Dutt's subsequent career was to change dramatically two years after that meeting: the fourth Congress of Communist Party of Great Britain was convened in March 1922 and appointed Dutt as the Chairman of the Organisation Commission to examine the Party's organisational structure. The Report was largely the work of Dutt who presented it to the Fifth Congress in October 1922. A unified hierarchical organisational structure was recommended with a strong Central Executive of which Dutt was a member.

Of course the Communist Party had been formed earlier in July-August 1920 at the First Unity Convention and Dutt was a foundation member since that time.

THE 'NEW' LINE

Whilst shortage of space and the necessity of focussing on Dutt's life and work prevents us from giving a detailed analysis of the Communist Party's history (insofar as one can extricate the two) it is nevertheless essential to point out some major issues and events in which Dutt played a significant role.

One such issue revolved around the question of the affiliation to or support by the CP for the Labour Party. In a draft statement in 1928 to the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) and in an Open Letter to the Party the CPGB's Politbureau stated that the Party should work for the re-election of a Labour Government for the second time 'in order to help the workers by their own experience to convince themselves of the worthlessness of reformism'. Simultaneously in the next general election the number of Communist Candidates should be increased and where no Party Candidates were contesting the official Labour Party Candidate should be supported, whilst at the same time criticising the Labour Party and propagating the Communist Party's policies.

Dutt and others were strongly opposed to this line and proposed in a minority report that there should be open opposition to both capitalist and Labour candidates by putting up a maximum number of Communist candidates. Dutt and 13

others suggested that a united front programme of demands should be drawn up and that workers should be told to vote for Labour candidates only if the latter accepted these demands as this would mean in certain instances withholding support for Labour candidates in many constituencies. Dutt and others concluded that 'the masses were ready to be organised into class action' against the Labour Party and that the Communist Party should move out from under the shadow of the Labour Party. In the deliberations that followed both nationally and internationally resolutions in support of the minority report led by Dutt were overwhelmingly agreed to.

Following on at the Eleventh Congress of the CPGB at the end of November 1929, Dutt's view that the new Central Committee of the Party should be composed of a majority of new influx of 'politically active comrades with good mass connections whose enthusiasm for the "new line" is beyond a doubt', as well as others in the Central Committee who, even though they had made errors in the past but were now enthusiastic about the 'new line'.

THE UNITY CAMPAIGN AND PEOPLES CONVENTION

Largely through the initiative of the CP a Unity Campaign was launched in January 1937, the manifesto calling for 'unity of all sections of the working class movement' and unity within the framework of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions.

For the CP the Unity Campaign had wider implications: it could be aimed at bringing 'to the working class the fundamental idea of their own strength and power'.

It was hoped to attract 'great masses of people now outside the movement who are seriously concerned at the present state of the world. They would ally themselves with the United Labour forces and afford the possibilities of developing a mighty People's Front which will bring down the National Government'.

From 1937 till the outbreak of the Second World War the Unity Campaign had agitated on foreign policy in the hope that war could be averted. When war broke out, initially the Communist Party supported the war effort because it was declared a fight against fascism. The Communist International, however, took a different view announcing that it is an 'imperialist war' to which no working class in any country could give support. Harry Pollitt, the general secretary of the CPGB was removed and Dutt, who had opposed the pro-war line from the beginning took over that position.

Mainly through opposition from the Labour Party the Unity Campaign disintegrated. The CP tried to keep the idea of Unity alive through the Peoples Convention. This was launched on 12 January 1941 and addressed itself to 'the workshops and the mines . . . the trade union branches and co-operative organisations, all groupings and associations of the wider mass of the people', for the 'victory of the peoples government' to oust the existing coalition government and a defence of living standards and democratic rights along with friendship with the Soviet Union.

Then in June 1941 the Soviet Union was attacked by Germany and the Party switched to unqualified support of the war, and the CP decided to 'disband the Peoples Convention: in place of advocating 'the building of wide, popular and powerful opposition' against the government, the CP now called for 'the united front of all sections of the people . . . all opposed to Hitler . . . in the joint war with the Soviet Union for the defeat of Hitler'.

Dutt opposed disbanding the Unity Campaign, even though it had ostensibly outlived its usefulness. We publish below a relatively little known letter (available in the Dutt papers at the British Museum), written by Dutt to Harry Pollitt the party general secretary on the continuing significance of the Peoples Convention:

Dear Harry,

I believe you will be making a really serious mistake if the Party decides to 'kill' or 'liquidate' the People's Convention.

You know, Harry, that I never stick to forms or labels when conditions change. But the question here is quite different. The decision would be a sequel to a wrong approach right through, and would do great harm.

From the beginning I have fought for an understanding of the Convention, which has never been clearly grasped and realised by our party forces. The Convention represented the first beginning (very weak, very small, but full of significance and possibilities for the future) of a coming together of all types of people in a broad democratic movement for immediate democratic aims in the present crisis. The role of the Party within it was not that of organiser (founding and running it as an auxiliary organisation, manipulating it from behind the scenes through puppet figures, and deciding to kill it when it considers the purpose served) but of one section within it, assisting to give political guidance through direct participation in an independent movement.

This was the purpose of the original call through mass signatories all over the country, which should have reached far beyond our connections, instead of through a few figures already closely associated with us. This was only very inadequately carried through because of the lack of understanding.

Nevertheless, the idea of the Convention caught on, despite our mistakes, and won a response which took the Government and also our Party by surprise. In the most difficult conditions, in the face of the most extreme hostility, it aroused a degree of mass interest and support which really frightened the Government and official opinion, who understood very well its significance and possibilities (compare Maurice Webb's confidential report).

But it is here that we failed to mobilise this really big potential mass support and instead proceeded to kill the Convention by turning it into a small auxiliary organisation run by us, peopling its committees with our own members and close associates, instead of drawing in the new forces and giving them a free hand, with only political assistance from a few of our politically capable representatives. The party should have been a small minority within the movement, openly participating and leading it politically only by the clearness of its political line, but not running it organisationally.

I ceased to follow its work during the recent period, as I lost interest in it in view of the way it was being run; but this was already before the change in the situation which is not the cause of the present difficulties.

The present problem did not arise from the change in the situation. The need for the active democratic movement is greater, and not less, in the present urgent situation; it should grow in strength, just as the party has grown in strength, in responding to it. Of course the democratic movement adapts the tactics to the situation; and, with the British-Soviet Alliance, becomes the driving force behind the Government for the maximum fulfilment of the Alliance, puts forward its constructive positive policy and criticism, and assists

to mobilise the people and to build up the Anglo-Soviet Unity Movement. The aim of the broad Anglo-Soviet Unity Conference, and the role of the Convention in assisting this, is excellent.

But the Anglo-Soviet Unity movement can't replace the Convention. How can the Convention 'merge' into the Anglo-Soviet Unity movement? The Anglo-Soviet Unity movement is based on one issue – Anglo-Soviet Unity, drawing in all supporters of this, irrespective of other differences; its programme cannot include the general democratic demands for which the Convention fights (Second Front, driving out of the Munichites, food policy, production policy, wages policy, etc.), or it would lose the broad character it should represent, with participation of representatives of all parties, civic authorities etc. The Anglo-Soviet Unity movement corresponds to our aim of the national front: controversial issues, or popular fighting issues not directly and inevitably recognised by all as implicit in Anglo-Soviet Unity, cannot be part of its programme, but can only be fought for within it or alongside by the democratic representatives.

To say that the Party alone can represent this democratic fight within the broad Anglo-Soviet Unity front is to take a sectarian view, and exclude a host of supporters for the immediate fighting aims which the Party advocates.

The Convention cannot be replaced by

- (a) the Anglo-Soviet Unity Committees, since these should be broad all-in bodies, of a type that can be presided over by a Mayor or Lord Mayor; and to turn them into a left democratic movement would be to narrow them and defeat their purpose;
- (b) RTD (Russia Today Society-PN), since this is solely concerned with the USSR and Britain, and not with any general democratic programme. It is obvious that for Pritt to be representative in Parliament of RTD or the Anglo-Soviet Unity Committee would be absurd; but he can be representative of the Convention;
- (c) the Party, since this would mean that all supporters of the immediate democratic programme...

Dutt was very active throughout the 1920s to 1960s; a strictly chronological account of his activity and work during these decades is not possible though we have presented a representative sample of this in other sections of the pamphlet. Insofar as Dutt's work within the CPGB is concerned, some material now in the Party's archives needs to be made available to the interested public.

VI

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA AND THE 1946 TRIP TO INDIA

In 1925 the Communist Party of India came into existence by an amalgamation of disparate leftist groups, (some of whom were emigres) and held its first Congress in India in December of that year.

Dutt was to play an increasingly important role in the affairs of the CPI and was the Party's main theoretical guide up to the early years of independence.

Dutt's prominence in the CPI was due to a number of reasons: Firstly under direction from the Comintern the Communist Parties of the Metropolitan countries were to establish through their colonial bureaux direct links within the Communist Parties of their colonies. It was in this context that Dutt began to play a pivotal role in the Indian Communist Party (having superseded his elder brother Clemens in this role). Whilst this was the context for Dutt's future rise, his prominence was laid by the publication of his *Modern India* (1926) which was intended both as a study guide and a Marxist analysis of the class forces operating in India and outlined the strategy and tactics for the Indian Communist movement.

Also, Dutt took over and largely filled the vacuum that had been created by M. N. Roy's expulsion from the Comintern in 1929, because of his opposition to Stalin's ultra-left policies. Prior to independence, and largely under Dutt's guidance the CPI followed two main strategies: either supporting bourgeois nationalism against imperialism (1935-39 and 1945-47) or in another period attacking bourgeois nationalism under the anti-capitalist strategy in the years 1928-1934 and 1948-1950.

In 1950 after the period of 'adventurism' (eg. the Telengana peasant uprisings of the late 1940s,) Dutt proposed a period of 'peoples democracy' in 1950 or a strategy and tactics of the 'New democracy' in which the notion of violent revolution was shelved and instead advocated the united 'four classes' either through united-front-from-above tactics vis-a-vis the progressive parties or united-front-from-below tactics with regard to the Congress.

'The fight for national liberation', Dutt wrote in *Modern India*, 'is a fight of many social strata – of workers, of peasants, of the lower middle class, of the intelligentsia and even of the bourgeoisie'. Therefore he continued 'the immediate important task is to carry on a battle of clarification within the existing movement and organisation. Within both the Congress and the Swaraj (self-rule) Party, the Left Nationalist elements should gather themselves round a popular national programme'.

However, in the following year in the second edition of the book the preface indicated a stand closer to the anti-capitalist strategy: 'The Indian bourgeoisie is today a counter-revolutionary force: they fear the social revolution that would follow on national independence more than they desire independence; and therefore they have made their terms with the imperialists and are all supporters of the Empire'. And the tactics that followed from this strategy were those where 'only a new national movement, based on the workers and peasants, and with a political and social programme expressing the interests of the masses, can bring new life. The conditions for this are ripe'.

THE TRIP TO INDIA

Dutt visited India for the first time in 1946 as a special correspondent for the *Daily Worker* and was therefore on hand to guide the CPI which he had hitherto done from afar. 1946 was a critical year for the triangular negotiations between the British, the Congress and the Muslim League. Dutt's account of his India visit was published in the *Labour Monthly* as a series of travel notes. In these he reaffirmed the correctness of the prevailing CPI strategy of wresting independence from 17

Britain in a 'unified national front' and that the Communists should give all support to Congress which had 'a long tradition as the main uniting body of all sections of Indian progressive nationalism'.

Dutt, however, also *reversed* a most crucial policy of the CPI; the latter's support for Pakistan. He described the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan as a reactionary demand and that religion could never constitute a nationality, and that the Muslims in India did not constitute a single nation. However that may be, Dutt still supported the idea of the right of self-determination and autonomy of the various nationalities in India, though he differed in some detail from the CPI, notably from Adhikari and P. C. Joshi's position.

Dutt's influence on the national question strategy can be judged by the fact that in April the CPI sent a memorandum to the Cabinet Mission declaring that the Party is firmly convinced that the best interests of the Indian masses will be served by remaining united in a common union.

Prior to Dutt's intervention in India's national question, the CPI had followed a policy of supporting the idea of Pakistan composed of a group of Muslim nationalities' confederated into a multi-national state of Pakistan.

VII ON RACE AND EMPIRE

Race and racism was an issue that Dutt addressed constantly and came back to again and again. He studied the 'race' question as being inextricably linked to other structures of colonial societies. Dutt's view on 'race' was neither reductionist, that is, reducing the ideology of race and the practice of racism to some underlying essential meaning such as class (property relations) though he at times *bordered* on this; neither did he see 'race' as *sui generis*, an autonomous structure of ideology and practice existing independently of the socio-economic conditions, institutions, etc. of each historical configuration. Thus, for Dutt, racism in the *modern era* could only be understood as an aspect of and being intrinsic to capitalism. In other words Dutt was well aware of the crucial link between certain modes of discourse ('Race') and the social arrangements that gives the former their operative sense.

We present below excerpts from an article Dutt wrote in *The Daily Worker* on 28 December 1965, entitled:

ANSWER TO 'RACE WAR' NONSENSE

It is fashionable nowadays to speak of the menace of race war. Once the favourite menace used to be the class war; but that we are told, is now extinct, and only an obsolete dogma of a few dictionaries. The menace overhanging the coming century, we are now told, will be the 'race war'—Yellow or black or brown versus white. Behind this picture of a battle between the colours on a palette is being concealed the reality of the struggle against

imperialism. When Africans or Asians struggle against 'White' domination they are struggling against imperialist domination.

... There is no 'natural' or 'instinctive' colour prejudice. It is an artificial social vice implanted by a given socio-political environment. Therefore it can be finally eradicated only by changing social-political institutions, and *meanwhile actively combatting the poisonous growth* (our emphasis). Colour and racial discrimination and prejudice is a product of capitalism and imperialism. It was unfamiliar in ancient and medieval times, though there was plenty of discrimination based on status. The European imperialist over-running, plunder and subjugation of the Asian, American and African continents was justified on the grounds of the 'divine mission' of the 'super white race' to rule the 'lesser breeds'.... So long as European imperialists massacred and enslaved Asians there was no talk of 'race war'. Now that the Asians and Africans have begun to fight back and win their independence, the cry goes up in high official quarters of the 'menace of race war'. But meanwhile the poisonous inheritance of colour and racial discrimination and prejudice remains dangerous, not only where it is openly proclaimed, as in South Africa, but also in Britain and the United States.

Whilst Dutt's analysis of 'race' and domination are to be found in all his works on the national and colonial question and on the race issue specific to British society that we discuss below, his analysis of this issue reappeared in seemingly unlikely contexts and places. One finds, for example, in his Notes of the Month in *The Labour Monthly* of October 1962 a critique of Britain's attempt to join the Common Market headed 'White Man's Club'. This club Dutt said, represented a narrow, closed, sectional, restrictive economic political military bloc, constitutive of about 5 per cent of the world's population, protected by a tariff wall, against the remaining majority of 95 per cent of the World. This Dutt claimed was happening at the very moment when the colour bar is beginning to break down slowly and partially in such 'backwaters' as the USA and Britain. For Dutt the Common Market represented a regressive step to re-establish a new imperialist White Man's Club on the basis of Western Europe.

Dutt continued, 'we think rather optimistically, that the fight of the British people against the Common Market monopolist offensive is linked with the fight of all the Commonwealth peoples, White and Afro-Asian, against the reactionary drive of ultra-imperialism'.

ON RACE AND RACISM IN BRITAIN

It must be stated at the outset that Dutt's analysis of the 'race' question and of racism was partially couched in the language of the 1950s and 1960s thus the use of the term 'colour bar', etc. Moreover, by the time that racism had crystallised into its present contemporary form, i.e. from the 1960s onwards Dutt's health had begun to fail and his desire for greater participation in the struggles of black workers that he had anticipated, for example with the Indian Workers Association, was only partially fulfilled (personal communication Mr. Vishnu Sharma).

Be that as it may, however, Dutt's concern with and participation in anti-racist work was considerable, both organisationally and in theoretical terms.

ON NOTTING HILL RACE RIOTS

After the Notting Hill race riots of Summer 1958 a conference was convened by *Labour Monthly* at which R. P. Dutt as Editor gave the opening speech which was published in December 1958:

The ugly danger signals of colour bar violence, of violence against coloured people, in Notting Hill or in Nottingham, have undoubtedly raised universal anger and condemnation. We welcome the prompt and unanimous declaration of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Conference, repudiating the colour bar and racial discrimination.

... We welcome the promise of a first step towards legislation against the colour bar by the next Labour Government. We of the left have agitated a long time for such legislation.

... The danger of a new colour bar offensive still exists even from high quarters. We cannot fail to note how Mr Butler at the Tory Conference on this question of coloured immigration promised legislation to deal with what he called criminal elements. We cannot fail to note how, only last week, Sir David Eccles, President of the Board of Trade, intervened in the Conference of the British Travel Association to secure the rejection of a resolution which was proposing that hotels and restaurants which barred coloured people should be excluded from the Association. Thus the present Tory Government has used its influence to protect the colour bar in Britain in the name of freedom.

We cannot also fail to note that even in some sections of the Labour and trade union movement there are some similar tendencies. Thus these have been the proposals ... for legislative restriction of Immigration of Commonwealth citizens ... (which) everybody knows ... is proposed in order to restrict the entry of the coloured people from the colonial countries. It is argued that such measures should be supported in the name of protection for jobs and housing because there is unemployment and because there is a housing shortage. That is the wrong way to set about these problems which arise from capitalist conditions, not from colonial immigration. What is to happen to these people? Drive them back to the conditions they came from? (But) there the the working population can find no means of livelihood, no employment, because of the conditions created by colonialism. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say that you are going to maintain these countries as colonial countries, rob them of their resources, deny them the fundamental freedom to build their own country, and reduce them to uttermost poverty and then, simultaneously, when in desperation they come here to find some means of livelihood say 'Back you go to the conditions we have created for you'. That is not an attitude worthy of socialists or the Labour movement ... Working class solidarity is the way to tackle all these problems of jobs, housing and other human needs. It is not enough to condemn the words of the colour bar and racial discrimination in this country so long as many of those who do so – and we are not speaking here of backward youths but of the highest social circles – so long as they condone and uphold the colour bar in the colonial sphere.

... Only last week the United Nations Assembly Political Committee carried a resolution condemning apartheid in South Africa, Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Australia (voted against the resolution). That is the official voice of Britain in relation to this issue of apartheid. That is the kind of thing we have got to fight and change. Therefore we have to

recognise that the question goes a little deeper than just racial prejudice.

As we have said earlier Dutt's analysis of racism has to be located in the particular historical context that he was writing; some things have changed enormously since the 1950s and 1960s: for example Afro-Caribbean and Asian people cannot be referred to as immigrants, since the majority have been born in this country, and the organised resistance by Afro-Caribbean and Asian British people has developed enormously since the time Dutt wrote the above article.

Dutt's strictures on the Labour Party as well as racism in the Labour movement, of course has a familiar contemporaneity, as does his analysis of racism in Britain in the 1960s published in the works we have already cited in this section:

The situation in Britain is serious. Racialist agitation has been freely used to divide the workers, stir up trouble and make (black) immigrants the scapegoats for the social evils of landlordism and capitalism. The major political parties have refused to make a stand. The Tory Party has refused to disown Peter Griffiths and the open scandal of Smethwick.

The Labour Party did not fare too well in Dutt's hands either and he called the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act 'a backward step'. The Labour Party, Dutt continued 'are voting against the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill while in opposition, has now turned a somersault, continues and operates this racialist Act even more ruthlessly. It has produced a White Paper on Commonwealth Immigration which (is) a shameful surrender to racialism . . . the governments Race Relations Act excludes the main spheres of discrimination, employment and housing, and is hamstrung by hampering limitations in its other provisions . . . The fight to defeat racialism in Britain is urgent, or the whole political future could be endangered. This fight is the vital common interest of all Socialists and trade unions, of all democrats and civilised people. We look for the closest co-operation of all sections of the Labour movement and the immigrants organisations.

In this section we have shown that in spite of failing health and relatively advanced age and even before the crystallisation of the 'race' question in its contemporary form, Dutt had provided profound analysis and prophetic insight into the racism of present day British society.

SOME EARLY SOUTH ASIAN ORGANISATIONS/ ACTIVISTS IN BRITAIN AND THE WEST (1857-1947)

Dutt of course was one among several individuals of South Asian origin who made an important contribution to the political and social life of Britain in the early decades of this century, some of whom we discuss briefly.

From the middle of the Nineteenth Century to Indian Independence in 1947 there were a significant number of South Asian political activists as well as organisations in Britain with one consuming passion: home rule or independence for India, and were all in one way or another Indian Nationalists. These organisations/individuals were a heterogeneous lot, some of them conservative in nature, others radical but all working to wrest power from and extricating their links with Britain in varying degrees. Some worked within the framework of British politics such as the Congress Committees whilst others adopted 'acts of terrorism' in Britain as their *modus operandi*.

THREE INDIAN MPS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Best known of all Indian activists in Britain have been the three Indian MPs Dadabhai Naoroji MP for Finsbury Central, Sir Mancherjee Bhownagree, Conservative MP for Bethnal Green North-East and Shapurji Saklatvala Labour and Communist member for Battersea.

Others stood as Parliamentary Candidates, such as Shavkat Usmani for the Communist Party in the 1929 General Election in the Yorkshire (Spen Valley) constituency but failed to get elected.

'Salisbury's Blackman'. This was the epithet given to Dadabhai Naoroji during the run up to his being elected as member for Finsbury. Given the present day controversy over black sections in the Labour Party and Black candidates for Parliament we shall go into Naoroji's election to the Commons in some detail because of some parallels between then and now.

Naoroji was elected to the Commons as the Liberal Member for Central Finsbury on July 1892. He came to be known as Salisbury's Black Man because of the remarks that Lord Salisbury, the then Prime Minister had made deprecating Naoroji. In a speech, Salisbury stated with reference to Naoroji:

'... and however great the process of mankind has been, and however far we have advanced in overcoming prejudices, I doubt if we have yet got to the point of view where a British constituency would elect a black man. I am speaking roughly, and using language in its colloquial sense, because I imagine the colour is not exactly black, but, at all events, he was a man of another race'.

Naoroji's election as well as Salisbury's speech made a sensation to which there was both support for and opposition to Naoroji's candidature. The *Spectator* wrote that if the electors of Central Finsbury like to be represented by a 'fire worshipping Asiatic' that's their business. Naoroji of course was the author of several books that dealt with the impoverishment of India under British rule and formulated his famous 'Drain theory', i.e. the drain of wealth from India to Britain as the direct cause of Indian impoverishment. However, whilst Naoroji (as well as other Indians) was preoccupied with representation and agitation for Indian self-rule he was not impervious to the race question as an issue of the utmost significance at that time. On November 24 1898 he wrote:

'I am afraid the race question will become in time a burning one. The backward races in other parts of the world seem destined to have a bad time. The European greed will be too much for them. But the Indian question will be a terrible matter for England, if she does not look out. Once India is fully aroused, and in these days of rapid development of political and moral forces this may come much sooner than we can expect, it will be impossible for England to hold her own'.

Sir Mancherjee Bhownagree (1851-1933) was the second Indian elected to the Commons. He was the conservative MP for Bethnal Green North East from 1896-1906

Shapurji Saklatvala (1874-1936) was the third Indian elected to the Commons and was an ardent communist and nationalist. Saklatvala first came to Britain in 1905 to receive medical treatment for a disease he contracted whilst prospecting for coal and iron in Eastern India. Saklatvala stayed in Britain and got himself employed as manager in the London Office of his Uncle's Colton textile mills department. Saklatvala made tentative but unsuccessful attempts as a Liberal

candidate in a local government election. Though coming from a wealthy industrialist family Saklatvala had developed some social concern before he arrived in Britain, for he had undertaken social welfare work in the slums and plague hospitals of Bombay in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Whist in Britain he gradually moved towards the left in British Politics. In 1910 he joined the Workers Union and became a member of the Independent Labour Party in its Central London branch.

He soon began to espouse causes that connected the British Labour Movement and the forces of Indian nationalism and later of course Indian communism. In 1921 Saklatvala left the ILP to join the Communist Party. In October 1922 he was supported by Battersea Trades and Labour Council and the Labour Party to contest the Battersea North seat on a Labour Party ticket. In this general election there were six Communist candidates, four standing as Labour, but only Saklatvala and Walton Newbold at Motherwell were successful. In the General election of 1923 he lost his seat by a narrow margin. However in October 1924 the Labour Conference banned Communists standing as Labour candidates and excluded Communists from Labour Party membership. Saklatvala thus contested North Battersea in 1924 as a Communist and won with a narrow majority over his Liberal rival.

In the Commons Saklatvala worked hard to emphasise the connection between the workers struggle in different parts of the British Empire but above all with the workers and peasants struggles in India.

Saklatvala had a turbulent political career and engaged fully in the local and national political and industrial disputes of the time. He was arrested on the first day of the general strike in 4 May 1926 for 'anti-Macdonaldism', he later spent two months in Wormwood Scrubs. He spoke vociferously on behalf of the locked out miners.

Saklatvala remained a member of the Communist Party till the end of his life and had by the mid 1920s become increasingly critical of the Labour Party's reformism.

Other activists in Britain

In the period prior to Independence there were a number of other Indian activists in Britain. Apart from Shaukat Usmani who failed to get elected to the Commons in 1929 and whom we have mentioned earlier, there were others who never contested a seat but were active in politics in Britain. Amongst these the more prominent ones are S. M. Kumaramangalam, Ms Renu Chakraverty, Jyoti Basu, H. N. Haridas, W. C. Bonnerjee, Ram Mohun Roy, Ms N. C. Sen, R. M. Joshi, J. M. Parekh, Sant Nihal Singh, and a host of student nationalists around the Indian Majlis (Society) at Oxford and Cambridge.

S. M. Kumaramangalam (1916-73) was born in Westminster in London and spent his childhood and youth in Britain. Whilst a student at Cambridge was involved in the formation in the 1930s of the Federation of Indian Students in Britain. He left Britain for India in 1939 and soon became active in Indian politics being elected to the Central Committee of the CP in 1942.

Indian organisations in Britain

There were, from the mid 1800s up to 1947 a large number of

