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But the reality is out of all proportion to the headlines.

Immigrants are being made scapegoats for problems of poverty which existed in Ireland long before their arrival.

One inevitable consequence of the anti-immigrant hysteria has been that racism is on the increase in Ireland. The levels of harassment and intimidation of black people are rising.

This pamphlet makes the case against all immigration controls and argues that racism is not inevitable but can be smashed.



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REFUGEES ARE WELCOME HERE!



**The case against
immigration controls**

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THE CASE AGAINST IMMIGRATION CONTROLS

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The growth of racism in Ireland

From the end of May 1997 in the middle of the general election campaign, immigrants suddenly became the target of politicians and the media. Newspapers had banner headlines shouting that "a new army of poor swamp the country". Talk of "floods" of refugees arriving in Ireland has become common.

Not only that, but these immigrants are portrayed as bringing disease, crime and fraud in their wake. "The tide of refugees poses a major public health threat - the spread of diseases like Aids and TB. A rise in crime would also be on the cards," said the *News of the World*. "Slam the door on scroungers" was their conclusion.

The portrayal of immigrants has been of sinister gangs, coming to Ireland to milk the system and to beg.

Supposedly liberal papers have joined in the hype. The *Irish Times* noted that by using the internet, immigrants had found that Ireland was easy to enter and gave generous benefits.

Aspirant right-wing politicians joined in the chorus. Fianna Fail's Liam Lawlor was the first to mount a campaign against what he saw as 'floods' of immigrants coming to Ireland. Colm McGrath and Ben Briscoe of Fianna Fail made it clear they were against housing immigrants in their constituency. Helen Keogh of the Progressive Democrats spoke out against "professional beggars."

The message to Irish people receiving Social Welfare is that they will have to wait longer for housing, benefits or health care because of these immigrants. The PAYE worker is being told that immigrants are adding to their tax burden.

Yet these ideas are complete hypocrisy. The same right-wing politicians have never before concerned themselves over the length of housing lists or the PAYE burden.

Their parties are responsible for the huge decline in spending on public housing and for the incredibly low tax on business which leaves 86% of the tax take to be raised by PAYE workers.



Refugees: the latest scapegoats

The politicians and the big business owned media have found an issue which is driving a wedge into the working class and causing people to buy into a racist view of immigrants.

The facts are out of all proportion to the headlines.

This pamphlet will show the real picture for immigrants is that of being forced by repression or hardship into having to undertake a difficult journey to look for a place to settle and contribute to society.

They are being made into scapegoats for problems of poverty which existed in Ireland long before their arrival.

One inevitable consequence of this is that racism is increasing in Ireland. The levels of harassment and intimidation of black people are rising.

By playing the anti-immigrant card the politicians and the media have whipped up a racist atmosphere where attacks on black people can take place.

Already there has been an arson attack on a Muslim mosque on the South Circular Road in Dublin.

Not long before this, one Zairean man was stabbed in the back of the head and subjected to racist abuse at Busaras. Another Zairean narrowly escaped an attack in his Dublin Hostel, from a gang bearing knives who shouted "nigger" at him. He was forced to jump out of a first floor window.

Racist graffiti with slogans such as "Niggers Out" has begun to appear in several areas around Dublin.

What the newspapers said:

Ireland faces a nightmare threat of race riots because of a growing invasion of refugees from abroad. The tide of refugees poses a 'major' public health threat - the spread of diseases like Aids and TB. A rise in crime would also be on the cards.

—**FRONT PAGE, NEWS OF THE WORLD, 1/6/97**

Our view: Slam door on the scroungers.

—**EDITORIAL, NEWS OF THE WORLD, 1/6/97**

5,000 refugees flooding to Ireland.

Floodgates open as new army of poor swamp the country.

—**HEADLINES IN SUNDAY WORLD, 25/5/97**

£100 a night to provide some refugees with hotel beds.

—**CATHAL O'SHEA IN THE SUNDAY WORLD 25/5/97**

Demand for curb on tide of refugees.

—**FRONT PAGE INDEPENDENT, 29/5/97**

Services face overload as refugee flood continues.

—**SUNDAY BUSINESS POST, 18/5/97**

Refugee flood to spark homes crisis, report warns.

Refugees flooding maternity hospitals.

—**HEADLINE IN HERALD, 16/6/97**

Some mothers come here just to have babies and return to their native countries.

—**DR. MICHAEL TURNER IN THE HERALD, 16/6/97**

The internet is considered partly to blame for the sudden surge of [refugee] interest in Ireland.

—**IRISH TIMES 26/5/97**

Three racist myths

The newspapers, backed up by similar comments from politicians and presenters of tv and radio shows, have created a view of immigrants that is now being taken for 'common sense'. But the facts behind their ideas show that they are simply myths, and racist ones at that.

1. Floods of asylum seekers are entering the country.

Firstly the language of this kind of sentiment is biased. When large numbers of sports fans leave a stadium, you rarely read descriptions of "floods of fans". It is particularly strange to talk of "floods" of refugees coming to Ireland when the real numbers are so small. In 1995 there were 424 asylum seekers, 1,176 in 1996, and it is estimated that between three and four thousand refugees will apply for asylum in 1997.

This represents just one percent of all asylum seekers coming to EU countries. It is a minuscule proportion of the estimated 30 million displaced people in the world. Around five million people live in the 32 counties today - but this is three million less than before the famine. Ireland has plenty of room for asylum seekers.

2. Immigrants are causing a housing crisis.

The housing shortage, which is causing real hardship, has been created by the failure of governments to allocate enough money to public housing. It has nothing to do with immigrants.

In 1996 local authorities built only 2,676 homes, despite the fact that there are 37,000 families on the waiting list for a house.

Speculators have been moving into the housing market, pushing up prices and making the situation worse. The cost of buying a new house increased by 17.3% in Dublin for the year ending March 1997. The price of a secondhand house rose by 20.8%.

As a result many people cannot afford to buy a house and those who do are up to their eyeballs in mortgage repayment.

Because of the shortage of cheap rented accommodation, exacerbated by the discrimination that many face, asylum seekers are usually forced to rely on the emergency services for homeless people and travellers operated by the Eastern Health Board.

These facilities are under a huge strain, as for years they have had inadequate funding.

Many immigrant families end up in B&Bs because of the absence of an alternative. Rather than being a luxurious treat, as some of the media suggest, B&B accommodation on a continuous basis is totally unsuitable for families. With no facilities for themselves and no place to stay during the day, men, women and children are forced to roam the streets for hours on end.

3. Refugees come here to milk the social welfare system.

The fact is that asylum seekers are not allowed to work. This is why they are forced to depend on the welfare system. They are only entitled to the same benefits as homeless Irish people, provided through the Community Welfare Officers.

Refugees are almost exclusively young. They have skills and abilities which are lost to their home countries and could benefit Ireland. If they were allowed to join the working population they would contribute tax and PRSI and be part of the solution to the fact that an increasing proportion of the population are reaching the age of retirement.

Ireland - a history of economic migration

One of the main arguments against immigrants coming to Ireland today is that they are not 'genuine' refugees. There is a distinction drawn between people fleeing persecution and people leaving behind miserable economic circumstances in search of a better life.

Politicians making this argument are saying that only the asylum seekers should be allowed into Ireland.

But we only have to think of our own history to see that this cannot be the way to view immigrants. From the 1840's onwards economic hardship has forced hundreds of thousands of Irish people to become immigrants.

The peak year for emigration from Ireland followed the famine. 369,000 people left the country in 1853. But emigration continued on a massive scale for decades. By the 1920s 43% of Irish born men and women lived abroad.

Emigration continued following Independence. Between 1936 and 1946 there was net emigration of 187,000. Between 1951 and 1956, 197,000 emigrated and from 1956 to 1961 another 212,000 people emigrated. Again, when the recession came in the early 1980s emigration picked up to around 44,000 a year. A study of school leavers in 1981 and 1982 showed that one in three had emigrated because they couldn't find a job in Ireland.

Since millions of Irish people have gone to other countries as economic migrants in the past, politicians who now want to deny immigrants the right to live and work in Ireland are showing complete double standards.



Ireland's record on refugees

There is a feeling for the underdog in Ireland, a sense that having been oppressed as a nation, we should identify with those people who are also fighting against oppression. Yet at government level the record of solidarity with refugees is appalling.

Fifty years ago, as the full details of the Holocaust were emerging, the Secretary of the Department of Justice wrote an internal memorandum which summed up the official Irish response to the plight of the Jews.

"The immigration of Jews is generally discouraged. They do not assimilate with our own people but remain a sort of colony of a world-wide Jewish community. This makes them a potential irritant in the body politic and has led to disastrous results from time to time in other countries."



The Irish Government has always done its best to actively discourage asylum seekers. There have been numerous cases of asylum seekers arriving at Shannon airport and being immediately bundled back on a plane without even being afforded the opportunity to make an application for asylum. Shannon Garda station now doubles as an official detention centre.

In 1956, in accordance with the UN Convention on Refugees, Ireland

accepted 530 Hungarians fleeing persecution from Stalinist dictatorship. But they made their lives so miserable that two years later only 56 Hungarians remained in the disused army camp near Limerick to which they had been brought.

A Chinese student who sought refuge in Ireland following the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre was immediately detained in Mountjoy Prison.

In June 1996 the Refugee Act was signed into law. It sets out for the first time in Irish law a procedure for making a claim for refugee status and outlines the rights that recognised refugees will have.

Some have called it a progressive piece of legislation and want it to be implemented with proper resources so that asylum seekers can have their claims dealt with quickly and their situation regularised.

However given the Irish government's record and the racist climate recently created here, there is a danger that the new legislation will be interpreted in such a way as to deny people refugee status and dramatically increase the number of deportations.

The main concerns about the Act are:

1. It does not provide for mandatory legal assistance and allows only for interpretation and information *where possible* in a language understood by the person seeking asylum.

2. It lays down twelve situations where refugee status will be denied. This includes lying or forging documents or travelling with false documents without reasonable cause. But how can a refugee have all their correct papers in order? Often the only way to escape a police state is to use false passports.

The Act means that asylum seekers can be held in detention centres if they have false identity documents or have failed to establish their identities. There is no limit placed on the length of time for which they can be held.

3. Some asylum seekers won't get their cases heard in Ireland at all. If the person has had contact with another EU country on the way to Ireland then that is where they must seek asylum even if all their contacts and evidence of identity are in Ireland.

Who are the real scroungers?

Despite the spectacular growth rates of the Celtic Tiger, the most recent Human Development Report found that 37% of Irish people lived in poverty. Unemployment, at 13%, is twice the average for industrialised countries and spending on health is below the EU average. So where is all the money going?

The simple answer is - to the rich.

Handouts to business are on such a vast scale that the £20m projected figure for Social Welfare to refugees is just pitiful.

Between 1981 and 1990 £4,600m of taxpayers' money went in the form of grants and subsidies to big business. This was supposed to provide more jobs, but only 7,000 new jobs were created in that period.

Taxpayers have had to foot the £70m bill incurred by Larry Goodman and the beef industry - as well as the huge costs clocked up during the beef tribunal.

Ireland has the lowest rate of tax on profits in Europe, many companies are paying just 10% on their profits. As a result it is the PAYE worker who is carrying state expenses. An estimated 86% of the total government tax take is coming from the PAYE worker.

It is these company directors and millionaires who are the real scroungers. With their foreign bank accounts and fast accounting, they think paying taxes is only for the poor. According to the Revenue Commissioners £1,900m is outstanding in uncollected taxes from companies and the self-employed.

It's no wonder that Tony O'Reilly, the richest man in Ireland, has his newspapers argue that immigrants are spongers. It suits him and his colleagues very well if the anger of PAYE workers is deflected away from the growing gap between rich and poor.

Why do they come?

Every 21 seconds someone is forced to become a refugee.

The vast majority of refugees, over 80%, flee to neighbouring countries. To put the figures for refugees coming to Europe in perspective, the number applying for asylum in the EU and the USA between 1983 and 1991 was one fifth the number who fled into Pakistan from Afghanistan. It was half the number of Iranians who fled to Turkey.

An examination of the country of origin of asylum applicants to Ireland over the last two years reads like a list of the world's top ten trouble spots. They include Zaire, former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Angola, Algeria and Nigeria.

The desperation of people to escape political repression is reflected in the horrific journeys that many asylum seekers are forced to take.

Recently a cargo ship docked off Waterford with nine Liberian refugees on board. Fearing that they would be forced off the ship, they had remained hidden for as much of the journey as they could. It was only when they were dying of thirst that they made themselves known to the crew. They endured all this because they feared for their lives if returned to Liberia.

That these fears are justified is shown by the recent Amnesty International figures - they know of 823 cases where someone has died as a consequence of "Fortress Europe" either preventing the arrival of, or deporting, asylum seekers.

Many refugees are trying to escape poverty, war and famine. These "economic" refugees are sometimes portrayed as having less justification for wanting to move. But in Ireland we should be well aware that famine is not a trivial matter.

Ironically countries trying to refuse entry to refugees are contributing to the causes of emigration. At present poor African countries pay £1,600m more to Western banks than their governments receive in aid. The IMF and World Bank, to whom most African countries are in debt, insist that governments carry out severe austerity measures. Two-thirds of African countries cut spending on health and education in the 1980s.

A quick look at some of the countries that people have been forced to leave in recent years challenges the myth that these people are scroungers or professional beggars.

Romania

At present, one out of every three refugees arriving in Ireland has come from Romania. Romanians are the main target of those who claim that significant numbers of asylum seekers are actually bogus.

Yet it is internationally recognised that both ethnic Hungarians and the Roma minority have faced persecution in Romania.

The position of Romas is particularly serious. According to the Human Rights Watch World Report 1997, last year Roma villages were subjected to systematic police raids, conducted without warrants and characterised by excessive use of force.

Random police violence targeting Roma was also commonplace and routinely tolerated by the authorities. On May 9, 1996 a twenty-six year old Roma was shot in the back and killed by the Chief of Police.

Certain religious groups also face persecution and homosexuality is a crime.

Meanwhile the economic situation is worsening. A deal has been struck this year with the IMF which will push many Romanians deeper into poverty. There are plans to sell off 850 companies and to close several industrial giants. The people of Romania have been warned that things will get much worse before they get better.

Zaire/Congo

During the thirty-two year rule of President Mobutu the country's mineral wealth was robbed while Mobutu amassed a personal fortune estimated at £4 billion.

Meanwhile Zairean people are the fourth poorest on the planet. Ten percent of children die before their first birthday. In 1992, one thousand children under five years old died per day from malnutrition and related diseases.

According to human rights organisations, the government of Zaire has both tolerated and committed human rights abuses.

They include extra-judicial killings, torture, looting, arbitrary detention and



Refugees fleeing Burma

prison conditions that are described as life threatening. Discrimination against women, ethnic minorities and Pygmies is commonplace.

Somalia

Civil war and drought wracked Somalia in the early nineties - in 1992 an estimated 300,000 people died.

The Western intervention at the end of 1992 known as "operation rescue" made the political situation worse and two years after their withdrawal there is still no recognised government in Somalia.

According to Amnesty, in 1996 unarmed civilians, including women and children, were among the victims of human rights abuses carried out by warring militias of clan-based factions.

Hundreds of deliberate and arbitrary killings, scores of politically motivated detentions, hostage-taking, torture—including rape—and ill-treatment were reported.

Meanwhile there are persistent reports of severe drought in South-Western Somalia. Economic chaos prevails with GDP per capita at about \$100.

Immigrants—part of history

Throughout history people have moved from one area to another to live. After all, this was how the world was populated. The early history of Ireland and Britain, like all other countries, is the history of wave after wave of immigration - of Celts, Anglos, Saxons, Vikings, Normans etc.

With the development of capitalism a clear pattern has developed, with large numbers of people moving to seek work. People go to the more developed area within an economy, and within the system as a whole, to the more developed countries.

All of the greatest economies in the world today were built by immigrant labour: the USA; Canada and Australia. 52m people are recorded as having left Europe between 1815 and 1930 for overseas destinations, with 33m going to the US. Between 1800 and 1850 the US population swelled by 35% each decade.

The German economy is another example. It was rebuilt after the war by the labour of ten million refugees who were displaced at the end of the war and with the help of four million guest workers.

The period after World War 2 saw the longest and most sustained boom in capitalism, which in turn generated a huge demand for labour and led to big movements of workers entering Europe as bosses looked beyond their own borders to attract new workers.

The Tory government in Britain in the early 1950s set up state recruitment schemes and employed private recruitment agencies to entice workers from the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent to take jobs in textile factories, metal manufacturing, the building trade, hotels, catering and health care - all jobs which had the lowest pay and conditions.

Other European countries were doing exactly the same. Germany made a series of agreements to obtain workers - including with Italy in 1955 and 1965, Morocco in 1963, Portugal and Turkey in 1964.

Competition was high to get and keep these immigrant workers. Turkish

miners brought to the Belgian Borinage area were convinced by German employers to move to the Ruhr. 12,000 Moroccans were promised tied housing to leave France for Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

By the early 1970s there were nearly 11m immigrants in Western Europe. But while in times of economic boom it suits the ruling class to have access to new sources of labour, the ruling class also make efforts to set the “native” workers against newcomers. Particularly in a time of job losses and recession, immigrants provide an easy target as scapegoats for the increase in poverty.

Enoch Powell in Britain was a Tory Minister of Health in the early 1960s. He ran a campaign in the Caribbean, India and Pakistan to find doctors and nurses for the NHS. He praised “the large number of doctors from overseas who came to add their experience, who provide a useful and substantial reinforcement of the staffing of our hospitals.”

But by the late 1960s he was waging a vicious anti-immigrant campaign and made his “rivers of blood” speech to whip up fears of an immigrant “invasion”.

The point is that it suits Europe’s rulers to obtain the skills and abilities of immigrants. But equally they value the divisions created amongst workers by anti-immigrant rhetoric. That’s why they unleash their media in a sudden period of anti-immigrant campaigning.

Fortress Europe

Europe is now a fortress. While the EU leaders talk about removing border controls within the European Union, external borders are being tightened with a view to keeping out East Europeans and people from the Third World.

For black people there is now nearly no possibility of entering Britain as an immigrant. It is even tough gaining entry if your husband, wife or parents already live there. The same is true all over Europe.

Today the EU spends four times as much keeping asylum seekers out of Europe as the UN High Commission for Refugees spends on all refugee aid programmes around the world.

This is happening at a time when racism is being stoked up by Nazi parties across Europe. In Germany fascists have systematically burnt immigrant hostels. In France, Le Pen's National Front has organised physical attacks on immigrants.

When the French Nazis marched in Paris on May Day 1995, a young Algerian who was unfortunate enough to have walked nearby was murdered in broad daylight by Le Pen's thugs.

Racism in Europe forms the backdrop to the introduction of severe anti-immigration policies whose aim is not only to keep out economic migrants but also to limit the rights of political asylum seekers.

The number of forcible deportations from the EU has rocketed, from 15,000 in 1990 to 200,000 in 1994. Deportations are also increasingly violent and aggressive, with private security firms and specialist travel agencies now being regularly used.

Eurostar, the high speed train in the Channel Tunnel, has two mobile cells in which deportees or suspected illegal migrants are chained to steel shackle points on the wall.

Refugees are increasingly subjected to inhuman and humiliating treatment with excessive violence. People aren't just handcuffed any more, but are sometimes bound with tape.

A Romanian refugee, Constantin Rudaru, was taped for so long by the

Dutch authorities that he couldn't breathe. He is now severely brain damaged.

Joy Gardner died in North London in 1993 after police broke into her home in the early hours of the morning, taped her mouth and hands and forced her into a contraption of locks and chains.

Some refugees have died after being injected with tranquillisers, while others have committed suicide rather than be deported.

This is not surprising given the experience of some deportees. A Zairean refugee was deported under the then British Home Secretary Michael Howard. The man was subsequently murdered. Howard has been found guilty of breaking the law in this case.

This is the human cost of immigration controls.

The situation is going to get worse as European countries introduce a variety of legal and administrative measures to make it harder to get into Europe. These include:

■ **Impossible visa requirements.**

■ **'White lists' of supposedly safe countries from which no applications for asylum will be entertained. In Britain this includes Nigeria where political opponents of the regime, like writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, have been hung.**

■ **Strict time limits for making applications, in some countries as little as three days.**

■ **Carrier sanctions which involve hefty fines for allowing people without papers or with fraudulent documents to board planes or ships.**

Three Romanians were left to drown off the coast of Canada when they were forced from a ship after it was discovered that their papers weren't in order.

A crew of Ukrainian sailors, fearing for their own livelihoods, murdered eight stowaways from Ghana on a ship bound for Europe because they couldn't afford the fines they would face if they brought the stowaways to an EC port.

■ Denial of welfare benefits.

A recent study followed the experience of 15 asylum seekers to Britain. In the beginning they were all optimistic about their future lives and enthusiastic about making a contribution in Britain. However, the reality of night shelters and no benefits or support quickly hit home. After three weeks three of the fifteen had tried to kill themselves while all were suffering from depression.

■ Being sent to countries outside the EU on the slightest pretext.

A Kurdish refugee was deported to Zimbabwe because the plane he arrived in had touched down in Harare for 40 minutes to refuel.

■ Immediate detention in special centres.

These centres, such as the disused army camp near Limerick that Hungarian refugees were kept in, have appalling conditions in which people can be made to live for years, regardless of whether they are eventually allowed to stay.

Against all immigration controls

Opposition to immigration has become the key issue for racists. This is because when politicians talk about controlling immigration they are not referring to white Americans, Australians or Scandinavians. Always the real targets of anti-immigrant hype are black people.

In the late 1980s there was a sudden increase in the numbers of white South Africans emigrating to Ireland. Yet there was no media campaign against them.

You can see how controls are used in a racist way at airports and ferries. Almost always if a black person is present they will be stopped by immigration officials.

Experience around the world has shown that once a government tightens immigration law, racists become more confident and attacks on black people increase.

In May 1993 German Nazis firebombed the home of Turkish immigrants in Solingen. Five women and children died. This occurred three days after the German government passed a new Asylum Bill.

It is sometimes argued that what we need are fair, non-racist, immigration controls, which will keep numbers arriving in check. Even left wing parties like Joe Higgins' Socialist Party have said that the numbers of immigrants should be limited to those we can accommodate.

But this makes dangerous concessions to racists. For a start it is a myth that there are potentially huge numbers of people wanting to come to Ireland. Any demand for controls also concedes that immigrants are a burden. The opposite is the case. Every immigrant has the ability to work and produce wealth for the society they live in. The cost of their education is born by their own country and when they move to Ireland it is effectively a transfer of wealth from these countries.

The other issue that is usually overlooked when people are talking about



immigration is that of class. Immigration controls are only ever used against the poor. If you are rich you can travel the world without difficulty.

If, like Mobutu of Zaire, you want to stash millions in European banks, the colour of your skin is no obstacle. But if you are African and want to work in Europe it is almost impossible.

Albert Reynolds had no qualms about issuing passports to millionaire Arabs who invested in his Cat and Dog food company. But poor immigrants from the Middle East who want to work in Ireland, let alone become citizens, have huge obstacles placed in their way.

The practice of immigration controls has a very definite political purpose.

The idea of Fortress Europe has emerged with the ongoing period of crisis that has affected European business since the 1970s. Despite two shallow booms, there are now 18 million people unemployed in the EU.

In Germany the number of people below the poverty line has doubled

since the 1970s.

All over Europe spending is being cut back in health services, housing programmes, education and social welfare. Even though Ireland is experiencing a boom which has caused it to be known as the "Celtic Tiger", poverty has continued to grow. Neither the FF nor FG led government has any intention of improving the situation for the PAYE worker and those dependent on Social Welfare.

All over Europe there is huge anger and dissatisfaction with the falling quality of life.

In these circumstances, rather than admit the failings of the system they are making profits from, big business and governments look for a scapegoat.

Having created racist ideas from the period of the slave trade and the time of European Empires, our rulers are now reshaping racism to deflect attention from their own failures.

The purpose of all immigration policy is not to defend the taxpayers, but to imply that it is black people or East Europeans who are to blame for long Social Welfare queues and high taxes.

This pamphlet has shown that the reasons given for immigration controls do not stand up to the facts. They are being introduced in Ireland arising from pressure by Tony O'Reilly's newspapers and because it suits the government to go along with the attack on immigrants.

There can never be "acceptable" immigration controls as they are always inherently racist.

Socialists want to see a world without borders. We see every human being as a person who can contribute to the society in which they live. Political refugees and people escaping poverty have as much right to choose where they want to live as a millionaire.

In order to fight the real causes of poverty, namely the policies of the Irish Golden Circle, we cannot allow ourselves to be divided and our anger turned against immigrants. That's why we say refugees are welcome in Ireland.

Can racism be ended?

In his typical manner of trivialising serious issues in order to appear controversial, Kevin Myers recently wrote “it’s time we gave racism a good name. In all cultures, all over the world, human beings have a subconscious agenda which is racist.” This view, that racism is a part of human nature, is a very common one.

It is also deeply pessimistic. If people are inevitably inclined to be hostile to someone with a different physical appearance, then the best we can hope for is to contain racism, living with the knowledge that it will always flare up again.

Despite the fact that this view is almost common sense, it is completely false. Racist ideas have not come into being as a result of human nature but rather from the horrific treatment of black slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

There has been oppression dating back to the first class societies of ancient civilisation, but only in the last four hundred years has that oppression been justified by skin colour.

As C.L.R. James wrote: “Historically it is pretty well proved now that the ancient Greeks and the Romans knew nothing about race. They had another standard - civilised and barbarian - and you could have a white skin and be a barbarian and you could be black and civilised.”

The Greek and Roman societies were based upon brutal slavery but the rulers justified their actions with the notion of culture, not race. White peoples were conquered to provide slaves as well as black.

The difference with the modern slave trade is that it was undertaken by a capitalist class who faced a difficulty justifying their actions. The European bourgeoisie had risen against feudalism behind the banner of “liberty, fraternity, equality” and the idea that all men (sic) were born equal. But if all men are equal, how could the horrific treatment of black slaves be tolerated?

Planters and merchants were the first to raise the idea that black people were inferior to white and the notion grew swiftly amongst the upper classes. Wealth based on slavery was an essential part of building up the



new capitalist system, and had be defended by them.

In 1760 the twenty three volume *Universal History* could write about Africans: “It is hardly possible to find in any African any quality but what is of the bad kind: they are inhuman, drunkards, deceitful, extremely covetous, and perfidious to the highest degree. If we look at those few manufactures and handicrafts that are amongst them, we shall find them carried on with the same rude and tedious stupidity.”

Having emerged with the slave trade, racism then further evolved alongside the developments in capitalism. The new capitalist classes of Europe and America developed their nation states into powerful structures and set up empires to provide links between industry and the world’s resources.

By the nineteenth century the racist argument was less crude but served effectively as a tool for the ruling class. Now it was a case of arguing that the rulers of Empires were doing the oppressed a favour. Left to themselves it was said, the people of Africa, India and indeed Ireland would achieve nothing. They were portrayed as being lazy, dirty and stupid. The first “scientific” rationalisations of racism started to appear, based on Darwin’s notion of evolution.

Darwin himself was not a racist, demonstrating that Europeans and Africans belonged to the same species and came from a common ancestor. Some of Darwin’s followers however tried to represent white races as being more evolved than black races.

Racism changed again in the twentieth century, in part because the fight by oppressed nations for liberation dealt a huge blow to the myth that empires were doing the oppressed a favour.

The emphasis of the racist argument has shifted to immigration. As has been shown in this pamphlet, attacks on immigrants serve to provide scapegoats for a society full of misery and injustice. Today very few people make public statements arguing that black races are inferior. But hostility to black people is kept alive by attacks on immigrants.

So racism is not an instinctual prejudice. It has specific causes and there are material reasons for the way in which it has evolved. This means that it can be smashed.

Parties such as Labour, who seek to run the state, cannot abolish the causes of racism. Only a genuine socialist society which planned production collectively and which met people's needs - ending unemployment and poverty - could eradicate racism.

Not only that, but the process by which racism is undermined is that of workers' struggles. Because strikes require unity, all mass struggles of workers have challenged oppression. The Chartists in Britain during the 1830s and 40s at the height of crude racism had a black man, William Cuffay and an Irish man, Feargus O'Connor, as their leaders.

During the 1917 Russian Revolution, decades of persecution of Jews was swept aside and Jewish leaders such as Trotsky occupied the highest positions in the workers' state.

By turning their backs on workers' militancy, the Labour Party, Democratic Left and the other reformist parties have no effective way to challenge racism. For electoral reasons they invariably give ground to anti-immigrant arguments.

The Socialist Workers Party stands in the revolutionary socialist tradition. Just as James Connolly strove for unity between Jewish workers and non-Jewish workers in his day, so we stand for black and white unity today. We see the fight against racism as part of the fight for socialism. If you agree then join us.

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