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## The Second Sight of Racialized Outsiders in the Imperialist Core

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### Brexit: erasing empire, occluding resistance

In a speech delivered at West Point on 5 December 1962, the then US Secretary of State, Dean G. Acheson, observed that ‘Great Britain has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role’.<sup>1</sup> When Britain joined the European Union (EU) in 1973, it seemed to many in the commentariat as if the country had finally taken its first tentative step on that much-postponed journey after empire, of finding a role for a once all-powerful state that was now in serious economic decline. While joining the transnational formation helped stabilise Britain’s economy, membership of the EU remained fiercely contested throughout the subsequent decades, with opposition led in particular by those on the Conservative right who never quite came to terms with the loss of Empire nor with the expectation of pooling sovereignty with sometimes bitter former political foes. Those eurosceptics were to savour victory four decades later when on 23 June 2016 - amid the most sustained economic crisis since the 1930s - the British population voted to leave the EU by 52 per cent to 48 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Today, with the benefit of hindsight, membership of the EU seems increasingly like an interregnum – a forty year hiatus sandwiched between the dying embers of a once global hegemon on the one hand and the persistent refusal of much of its populace to come to terms with its loss, address the legacy of its disturbing underside and finally heal what has now become a festering open wound. In fact, the end of Britain in Europe only served to highlight how widespread nostalgia for an imperial Britain had become in the current conjuncture. Today, such melancholic reactions<sup>3</sup> are one of the quintessential characteristics of the British.

An equally striking feature of the Brexit campaign was the racialization of the politics of class and inequality signified by the emergence of the category white working class in political discourse. In the run-in to the campaign, then UKIP leader Nigel Farage had claimed that ‘the white working class was in danger of becoming an underclass’<sup>4</sup> because of immigration. When he became the figurehead of the *Leave EU* campaign, Farage repeatedly stressed how the EU had done great harm to Britain: ‘Open-door migration has suppressed wages in the unskilled labour market, meant that living standards have failed and that life has become a lot tougher for so many in our country’.<sup>5</sup> And this message was amplified by the right-wing press who had themselves begun to deploy this category for their own instrumental ends, particularly for eroding support for multiculturalism.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the white working class – was brought to life as a collective social force in the Thompsonian

sense<sup>7</sup> such that many older working men and women came to understand and make sense of the real economic pain they suffered through a racialized frame of white working class victimhood. And accompanying the logic of this narrative was the idea that their salvation lay in voting for Brexit and the so-called last authentic representatives of the British people. It worked. While an analysis of the Brexit vote revealed its cross-class composition, it had particular appeal among the so-called semi- and unskilled parts of the working class with two thirds of those in social classes D and E who voted, choosing to leave the EU.<sup>8</sup>

The effects of Brexit have been nothing less than catastrophic for those engaged in social justice and anti-racist projects in Britain. It helped cohere and then shift those parts of the working class most invested in understanding the ‘white working class’ as the main victims of globalization firmly into the camp of the anti-immigrant right-wing. Significantly, by juxtaposing the category white working class to immigrant, such a narrative not only privileged one stratum of Britain’s working class over the other on the grounds of citizenship, it also erased those parts of the working class who were black and brown Britons. If Brexit narratives proposing to recapture a lost era of global dominance had been represented through the eyes of those Britons whose ancestral origins lay in the nations once conquered by the imperial British state one would have encountered a more complex, circumspect set of reactions.

For them, talk of putting the great back in Great Britain would have re-awakened suppressed and painful family memories of colonial subjugation and institutional oppression at the hands of the British Empire that materialised in a thousand different discriminatory outcomes in everyday life. To speak to black and brown Britons and those of Irish Catholic descent of Britain becoming a global hegemon again would have been to expose Empire’s underside of subjugation and oppression legitimised by scientific racism. It would undoubtedly have provoked further reflection about how the overdevelopment of Britain at the expense of the underdevelopment of India, Ireland and the Caribbean among others created a global reserve army of labour that also regularly brought the Empire home. That is, men and women from all corners of the world ranging from former enslaved peoples of African-American and Caribbean descent, Irish Catholic labourers, African and Asian lascars, ayahs, servants and seafarers, along with Jewish migrants escaping the racist pogroms within the Tsarist Empire, all made their home in Britain at different moments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and sometimes earlier. Significantly, most entered the ranks of the working class confirming it was a multi-ethnic formation long before the *Empire Windrush* – with its 493 passengers from Jamaica – docked at Tilbury in Essex in the summer of 1948.<sup>9</sup> ‘We are here because you were there’ as the anti-racists of yesteryear used to claim.<sup>10</sup>

By erasing black and brown Britons then, those involved in the Brexit campaigns also banished from public discourse any critical discussion of, and coming to terms with, how the new proposals would compare with the underside of the actual British Empire – namely, imperialism and racism. And it was only through this sleight of hand, that Brexit and the related promise of recovering Britain’s lost position as first among equals of a new global trading bloc was made more palatable to the general public. Raymond Williams once remarked that ‘[t]o be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing’.<sup>11</sup> With this in mind, I will demonstrate that by bringing into view the long-established ethnic heterogeneity of the working class in Britain not only allows us to subject the processes of colonialism and racism that helped manufacture it to greater critical scrutiny but also makes more transparent those human resources of hope that have historically mounted collective action in opposition to such processes within the heart of Empire itself, and who might possibly one day contribute towards their eventual overcoming.

I begin however by exploring the extent to which racism and imperialism were a blind spot of the European socialist movement in general over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, and whether this facilitated the integration of key parts of the working class into the politics of racialized nationalism and imperialism. I then turn to consider a minority current of socialist internationalism, and focus in particular, on making more visible the involvement of racialized outsiders in such politics in imperial Britain. What was it about their specific social location that made them more receptive to such a universalist outlook than the rest of the socialist and working class movement? Drawing critically on the work of Du Bois, Hall and Deutscher, I will show that the combination of collective memories of colonial subjugation combined with their own racialized experiences in the imperialist core endowed such socialist racialized outsiders with a second sight, a form of epistemological standpoint that helped facilitate them play a catalytic role in building solidarity between the different ethnic stratum within the imperialist core and beyond. Finally, I outline how a focus on the racialized outsider contributes to a stretching of Marxism both theoretically and with regard to political practice by forcing it to confront the independent effectivity of racism and anti-racism without reducing it to class.

### **When socialist internationalism was Irish, Jewish and Indian in imperial Britain**

Despite Marx’s claim that the worker has no country and for ‘workers of the world to unite’<sup>12</sup> the vast bulk of the European socialist movement organised in the Second International and representing such workers did its best to prove him wrong. Socialists in fin de siècle Europe manifested a deep attachment to a racialized conception of the nation and offered avid support for their respective state’s imperialist adventures.<sup>13</sup> This was most

strikingly revealed in the so-called 'revisionist debate' of the late 1890s where Eduard Bernstein, a leading intellectual of Europe's largest socialist party - the German SPD – was also one of the strongest advocates for a socialist colonial policy on the grounds that the allegedly higher civilizational culture of Europeans would help to uplift to the so-called inferior races of mankind. And such advocacy was laced with a warning that '[r]aces who are hostile to or incapable of civilisation cannot claim our sympathy when they revolt against civilisation...savages must be subjugated and made to conform to the rules of higher civilisation'.<sup>14</sup>

Bernstein was by no means an exception; such thinking sedimented itself across most European socialist parties nesting in imperial formations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as working class struggles for social and economic justice came to be contained within the confines of each individual nation-state. In Britain, socialist support for imperialism emerged most strongly when anxiety about the physical decline of the so-called British race peaked during the Second Boer War between 1899 and 1902. It encouraged the Fabians - who provided much of the intellectual stimulus in the newly-founded Labour Party - to reinterpret the objective of social justice for the working class as not an end in itself, but rather a means to maintain Britain's imperialist ambitions abroad.<sup>15</sup> A corollary of this welding of the cause of working class upliftment to the project of Empire was to make this class more conscious of the role it needed to play in its defence.<sup>16</sup> What was significant about such expressions of support for Empire was that they emanated from political organizations and leaderships that had emerged from the self-organised struggles of the working class itself. It gave these leaders and their statements and actions a degree of authenticity among the working class, and helped consolidate those on-going efforts of the British ruling elite to integrate workers through relentless propaganda drives and invention of national traditions.<sup>17</sup>

Even when it appeared that socialists opposed colonialism, their anti-imperialist politics were often stained through with antisemitism. One of the most vocal opponents of Bernstein for example was British socialist and leader of the self-proclaimed Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF) Henry Hyndman, who opposed British imperialism in southern Africa and the Anglo-Boer war because it had been instigated by 'Jewish bankers' and 'imperialist Judaism'.<sup>18</sup> Alongside the more established ideological positioning of the Jew as an anti-working class figure another set of representations of the Jew as capitalist exploiter *par excellence* emerged in this moment. The latter trope was a consistent theme drawn upon by Hyndman who saw the capitalist Jew in almost demonic terms, lying at the centre of 'a sinister "gold international" destined one day to be locked in mortal conflict with the "red international" of socialism'.<sup>19</sup>

Racism (including antisemitism) and imperialism then, have been, the achilles heel of European socialism ever since its inception as a mass social movement in the late nineteenth

century. Against this general flow of things however, there has been a minority current, a contraflow within European socialism which offered a more consistent opposition to imperialism, racism and antisemitism informed by a position of class universalism and global solidarity more in keeping with Marx's original vision. These socialist internationalists included such well-known figures as Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. Indeed, it was Luxemburg who challenged most systematically the presuppositions that underpinned the case for socialist support for imperialism. In the course of the revisionist debate, Luxemburg exposed how Bernstein's advocacy of a peaceful transition to socialism in Europe was wholly dependent upon the super-exploitation of the non-European world. She and her allies firmly opposed any attempts to guarantee the security of the European working class at the expense of a 'policy of overseas conquest and robbery'<sup>20</sup> that brutalised indigenous populations. For Luxemburg, the cornerstone of socialism was not 'European solidarity' but 'international solidarity embracing all parts of the world, all races and peoples'.<sup>21</sup> Such a deeply-held commitment to a universal humanism was intrinsic to her Marxism as this letter to a friend, Mathilde Wurm, highlights:

...the suffering of the blacks of Africa with whose bodies Europeans play ball are just as near to me as the suffering of the Jews in Europe...I am at home in the entire world, where there are clouds and human tears.<sup>22</sup>

This current of socialist internationalism was also present within the British socialist movement and included organisations such as the Socialist League and individuals of the calibre of William Morris, Belfort Bax and Sylvia Pankhurst.<sup>23</sup> Bax in particular was forthright in his position declaring that the struggles of the colonized in Africa against the 'white man is our fight'.<sup>24</sup> Often occluded however has been the fact that racialized populations including Jews (particularly refugees escaping the pogroms in Imperial Russia), colonized populations like Irish Catholics, Indians as well as their British-born descendants formed a significant contingent of this current of socialist internationalism in the first half of the twentieth century. They were at the forefront of agitating against racism, of developing theoretical accounts of imperialism and its corrosive effects on the British working class, and of actualising initiatives promoting proletarian internationalism between British workers and those abroad.

When the socialist newspaper *Justice* boasted of 'dealing effectively with those malcontents who are bent upon following the lead of the German-Venezuelan Jew Leob, or "de Leon", to the pit of infamy and disgrace'<sup>25</sup> it was James Connolly - the Edinburgh-born son of racialized Irish Catholic migrants - who opposed such socialist antisemitism. He condemned the Hyndman-Quelch wing of the SDF for 'appealing to racial antipathies and religious prejudices'<sup>26</sup> as a device to undermine support for syndicalism among the left-wing of the party, and made clear the incompatibility of racism with socialist politics:

...comrade de Leon is a Venezuelan, and the descendant of an old family, famous alike in the history of Spain and the New World, but if he were all that the *Justice* phrase has him, what of it? Suppose he were a German-Venezuelan-Jew, or a cockney-Irish-Scotsman, or even horror of horrors, an Anglo-Saxon, what is it to us or to Socialists generally?<sup>27</sup>

And when, in the years leading up to WW1, *Justice* began resounding with attacks on ‘the jack-boot bullying of Berlin’ and calls for the British state to expand its Navy, and arm the citizenry in preparation for war with the Kaiser’s Germany,<sup>28</sup> it was a contingent of mainly Jewish socialists in the East London branches of the SDP in Central Hackney, Whitechapel and Bethnal Green who offered the most consistent opposition to such calls for war.<sup>29</sup> Zelda Kahan, supported by her brother Boris, her Irish partner WP Coates, and EC Fairchild campaigned incessantly urging the SDP to ‘repudiate such bourgeois imperialist views’<sup>30</sup> while Theodore Rothstein repeatedly rejected Hyndman’s ‘Teutonophobia’ and his calls for socialists to unite with the British ruling elite:

We find you joining your voice in the war chorus of the Imperialists, and calling upon the people...to forget the class antagonisms...in a common effort to stave of the ‘national peril’. If that is Social-Democracy I for one refuse to accept it.<sup>31</sup>

Tragically, history shows that such socialist internationalism was unable to prevent British workers from turning their guns on proletarians from other nations in the killing fields of France and Belgium during WW1. In fact, this current of socialist internationalism was almost extinguished across the whole of Europe in those days with Trotsky sardonically remarking on his journey to the anti-war conference at Zimmerwald that ‘half a century after the formation of the First International it was still possible to fit all the internationalists in Europe into four coaches’.<sup>32</sup>

Significantly, when, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of November 1917, most of the remaining socialist internationalists in Britain re-grouped within the newly-established Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), what was striking about its 2,500 members<sup>33</sup> was that just like before WW1, they ‘consisted to a remarkable degree, of persons of non-English origin’.<sup>34</sup> A special branch report confirmed such an impression when it characterised one early CPGB audience as comprising in the main of ‘Aliens, Jews and Sinn Feiners’.<sup>35</sup> A year after its formation, over two-thirds of its members were to be found in South Wales, London and Scotland, with East London and Glasgow representing the main centres of strength – both areas of significant Irish Catholic and Jewish settlement.<sup>36</sup> At its formation then, the CPGB comprised socialists drawn largely from the so-called Celtic fringe

of Britain and racialized groups such as Irish Catholics, Jews as well as a sprinkling of Indians, Caribbeans and Africans.

It was within this ethnically diverse milieu that one of the first systematic assessments of British imperialism and particularly its deleterious impact on the white worker was developed by one of the early theoreticians of the CPGB, Rajani Palme Dutt – an Englishman of Indian and Swedish descent. Dutt contended that the establishment of the British Empire or what he termed that ‘great plantation of pure capitalist slavery’<sup>37</sup> had helped manufacture an imperial outlook in much of the British working class characterised by ‘working-class division and corruption, racial separation, tyranny and militarism, and the destruction of working-class internationalism’.<sup>38</sup> Such effects, he continued, were a direct ‘reflection of a material situation that has temporarily placed a section of the world proletariat in a peculiar position’, namely, that of a ‘White labour aristocracy’.<sup>39</sup> One of the CPGB’s programmatic documents of the period elaborated that:

The wealth accumulated by the capitalists throughout the period of imperial expansion has enabled the exploiters to corrupt the British workers, creating a labour aristocracy of skilled workers, while the unskilled have been organised into general labour organisations staffed by a well-paid reactionary bureaucracy.<sup>40</sup>

There was no underestimating the scale of the task facing British communists: ‘The British working class is politically backward. All its existing traditions belong to the period of social patriotism’,<sup>41</sup> and a relentless ideological and political struggle must be waged to make them realise ‘that the interests of the white workers are not identical with those of the bourgeoisie, [and that this] is the first step to their own emancipation.’<sup>42</sup>

Given such a trenchant critique, the CPGB forcefully declared its opposition to imperialism:

The Communist Party regards the maintenance of the British Empire as an act of deadly enmity to the workers of this country and the whole world. So long as British imperialism reigns, there can be no peace in the world, nor can the world’s economy be organised or bring relief to the masses. Our Party, therefore, declares, its solidarity with the oppressed nations under the British flag, and, contrary to the bourgeois Labour Government, demands the full political and industrial freedom of India, Egypt, and the “protectorates” within the confines of the Empire.<sup>43</sup>



In these years, the party repeatedly emphasised how working class racism was ‘part of the imperialist rationale to stress the inherent backwardness of African peoples and...it was a mark of the political backwardness of British labour that it believed it.’<sup>44</sup> In 1925, it passed a resolution at its annual congress that called on every party member to ‘actively take up the fight against the imperialist prejudices still existing amongst large sections of the working class in Britain.’<sup>45</sup>

However, while English leaders of the CPGB such as Harry Pollitt certainly made regular statements against working class racism,<sup>46</sup> it was mainly racialized minorities such as Shapurji Saklatvala – an Indian Parsi – who played a formative part in actualising working class solidarity between workers in the imperial centre and elsewhere in the Empire. Arriving in Britain in 1905, Saklatvala had first joined the ILP as a committed anti-colonialist but shifted his allegiance to the CPGB at the time of its founding. Along with Arthur Field – an ILP activist - Saklatvala established the Workers Welfare League (WWL) in 1917 with the aim of forging unity between the Indian and British labour movements whose fortunes he believed were ‘inextricably linked’.<sup>47</sup> Leading trade unionists like Arthur Pugh of the Iron and Steel Trades Federation and Duncan Carmichael - later secretary of the London Trades Council - endorsed the activities of the WWL with Pugh drafting a joint statement with Saklatvala stressing the ‘Indian labour problem is to be recognised as an English problem, seriously affecting the question of maintenance of standards of life among the workers working competitively in the same industries within the Empire’.<sup>48</sup> Further, they declared their intention ‘to bring together representatives of the working classes in Great Britain and India in order that they be of mutual aid to each other’.<sup>49</sup> Such calls for solidarity became more evident after the Bombay cotton strike of 1923 with Saklatvala making regular ‘references to the jute industry of Bengal, and how necessary it was for the workers there and those employed in Dundee to make common cause.’<sup>50</sup>

Over the course of the 1920s, the patient ideological and political solidarity carried out by Dutt, Saklatvala along with others like the Irish Catholic-descended Arthur McManus,<sup>51</sup> helped garner solidarity from important sections of the organised working class such that incrementally, these strata began to acquire a more internationalist outlook. This perspective was strengthened further with the establishment of the Comintern-backed League Against Imperialism (LAI) in February 1926 in Berlin which set out to mobilize a broad united front in western Europe in support of the emerging movements of national liberation in the colonies.<sup>52</sup> A British Committee of the LAI was constituted in April 1926 and one such LAI conference held in Newcastle was attended by 136 delegates from 64 organizations, including various trade unions and the ILP.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the WWL - now nesting within the CPGB – was beginning to make important inroads into the organized labour movement such that by 1927, it had gained the affiliation of 78 trade union branches.<sup>54</sup> And in 1928, a conference organized by them in Wales was attended by 148 delegates, including

representatives from 33 miners lodges, 25 women's co-operative guilds and 20 local trades councils.<sup>55</sup>

### **Racialized outsiders and their privileged epistemological standpoint**

Ever since the formation of the European socialist movement in the late nineteenth century then, some of the most forceful and steadfast advocates of proletarian internationalism in the imperialist core, including in Britain itself, were socialist racialized outsiders. But what was it about their social location within the heartland of Empire that made them particularly receptive to such thinking and politics? A central determining factor was that such men and women came from communities who carried with them collective memories of colonial subjugation legitimised by a modality of racism that understood them as inferior and lacking in capacity for civilization. When they arrived in Britain, they encountered a political culture stained through with a deeply-felt racism where racializing frames of representation were actively deployed by all social classes to further reinforce their already precarious status. Consequently, not only did their ancestral nation remain under the iron heel of the British state they also found themselves excluded from popular conceptions of British national identification because more often than not it was relationally defined against them. That is, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, how the British came to know themselves was more often than not secured in opposition to these so-called 'others' both at home and abroad (i.e. the British were Protestant in opposition to the Catholic Irish, Christian not Jewish, and of course white in opposition to those who were black and brown). And in this way, the racialized from the colonies became the racialized outsiders of the imperialist centre.

Understandably, the power of such a suffocating and exclusionary racism generated a degree of detachment, even indifference to identification with the British nation-state among such racialized outsiders that contrasted sharply to the generally powerful and unthinking identification that was so characteristic of the working class that understood itself as Protestant and white.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, such a condition generated no necessary collective resistance in and of itself. In fact, W.E.B. Du Bois drew our attention long ago to how, with regard to the racialization of African Americans, the weight of such structural oppression could just as easily contribute to destructive forms of symbolic violence and the internalisation of racism, of 'always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'<sup>57</sup> And such a mental state contributed, more often than not, to a state of submission not resistance, a resigned acceptance to one's given lot in life.

Elsewhere however, particularly in his lesser known work *Darkwater* (2003), Du Bois attempted to carve out an analytic space for resistance with his claim that such a marginal existence endowed racialized African Americans with the gift of second sight, a form of privileged epistemological standpoint which allowed them to see things as they really were, equipping them to expose the inequities of a system because they experienced it most directly and powerfully.<sup>58</sup>

I contend that this experience of racism combined with the vista it opened up on society as seen from its margins, or its nooks and crannies, produced two very different kinds of reactions among those racialized outsiders who moved towards socialism in the imperialist centres of the West. For the first set, it led them to suppress and sometimes even dispense with any public embrace of the particularist racialized identity that had brought them to socialism in the first place, and replace it for the more universalist identification of class. This response was undergirded by the supposition that the abolition of class exploitation would also bring about the liberation of all, including the racially oppressed. Representative of this tradition included figures such as Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky as well as Karl Marx. Isaac Deutscher uses the term ‘non-Jewish Jew’,<sup>59</sup> to categorise such figures in the European socialist world who found themselves drawn to the universalism of class politics because ‘the very conditions in which they lived and worked did not allow them to reconcile themselves to ideas which were nationally or religiously limited and induced them to strive for a universal Weltanschauung’.<sup>60</sup> Alongside their non-Jewish comrades, they strove ‘for the universal, as against the particularist, and for the internationalist, as against the nationalist, solutions to the problems of their time’.<sup>61</sup> In the mind of the ‘non-Jewish Jew’ then, we can infer that racial identifications, at least in retrospect, were merely a staging post on the journey towards the normative goal of socialism, and its promise of liberation and freedom for all.

As we saw earlier in the essay, this commitment to a universalist outlook did nothing to blunt Rosa Luxemburg’s ardent opposition to all forms of racism and imperialism. At the same time, I contend her theoretical frame left little analytic space to account for the specificity of racist oppression as distinct from class exploitation. Such a weakness arose from her underestimation of the depth of societal racism, including working class attachment to imperialism and the politics of racializing nationalism in the West. For Luxemburg, even if the working class manifested racist attitudes and behaviours as part of the broader condition of reformism, she remained convinced that a revolutionary class consciousness would emerge like an ‘electric shock’<sup>62</sup> when the class struggle intensified thereby ensuring the ultimate success of socialist internationalism. Here, Luxemburg appears to understand racism (and reformism more generally) as a form of false consciousness, a thinly constructed mask of mistaken ideas or beliefs. In particular, she fails to grasp how in countries like Germany or Britain for example, where racism had a long history, and formed an intrinsic component of its national fabric, including working class culture, parts of that class often interpreted their class-based subjugation through the lens of ‘race’, and, even sought to

mobilise on such a basis to maintain their economic and political security such that race effectively becomes ‘the modality in which class is ‘lived’, the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and ‘fought through’.<sup>63</sup> How could it be otherwise in a nation-state such as Britain in particular that was the imperial hegemon of the world-system and whose Empire – which encompassed a quarter of the world’s land surface and a fifth of its global population - was legitimized through such discourses both abroad, and at home?

Racism then can no longer be thought of as something superficial, an unwelcome accretion on an otherwise healthy polity. Instead, it is better understood as a kind of unquestioning imaginary that represents the real world, and that provides individuals in society with:

...those systems of meaning, concepts, categories and representations which make sense of the world, and through which individuals come to ‘live’ ...in an imaginary way, their relation to the real, material conditions of their existence.<sup>64</sup>

The failure to grasp the structural character of racism born from waves of imperialist conquest and its resultant embeddedness within European society over several centuries, including the working class that was forged in such unfertile soil, left Luxemburg with a supreme (but unrealistic) confidence in that class to perform its historic role as the gravedigger of capitalism. Tragically, she would pay for such an optimistic vision with her life. ‘In her assassination Hohenzollern Germany celebrated its last triumph and Nazi Germany – its first’.<sup>65</sup>

If one contingent of socialist racialized outsiders within the imperialist core negated the specificity of questions of anti-racism and colonial liberation in their analysis of class and capitalism as a result of their failure to take the structuring power of racism seriously, the other set entangled them more deeply, and in the process attempted to stretch socialism (and particularly Marxism) to accommodate a deeper understanding of racism and colonialism in the manner that Fanon was to encourage later.<sup>66</sup> James Connolly for example recognised at a practical, political level the emancipatory potential of lived identities forged by the experience of racial and national oppression in producing resistance to the dominant order. This is why he was so insistent that Irishness – which signified vis-à-vis British imperialism simultaneously both an oppressed national and racialized group identification – was central to his conception of socialist internationalism. Anticipating Lenin’s (1914/1983) better known work on the national question, Connolly recognised earlier than most European socialists how imperialism and mass nationalisms had structurally altered relations between workers of the world. And that this obliged them to combine their commitment to working class

emancipation with active support for the struggles of racially and nationally oppressed peoples both in the periphery and the core.<sup>67</sup>

CLR James was another socialist racialized outsider who spent much of his life in the imperialist core of Britain and the US<sup>68</sup>. In his famous debate with Trotsky, he recognised the revolutionary potential of African Americans in the heart of the emergent global hegemon referring to them as the ‘vanguard of the revolution’. Because of their racialized experience under first slavery and then Jim Crow, he claimed African Americans were not ‘deceived by democracy’ and there is:

...no soil from which illusions about bourgeois democracy can flourish. The Negroes have no need to dream dreams and see visions of a new society. It is always before them to be able to live as white America lives. But that desire, modest as it is, they will never get under capitalism.<sup>69</sup>

Given such consciousness, for James, the struggle against racism was by definition a struggle against capitalism, and therefore a ‘constituent part of the struggle for socialism.’<sup>70</sup> Theoretically, this more complex picture of emancipatory politics offered by the likes of Connolly and James where questions of class are purposely entwined with questions of racial and national oppression forces socialists and Marxists to explicitly confront questions of racism and anti-racism and then integrate their independent effectivity within their intellectual thought and political practice.

## **Conclusion**

Perry Anderson has described Marxism as ‘the search for subjective agencies capable of effective strategies for the dislodgement of objective structures’.<sup>71</sup> When Lenin recognised that the uneven development of historical capitalism, particularly the division of the world into imperialist and colonised nations, had effectively blown off course the unfolding of the global class struggle along the lines that Marx and Engels had predicted in the *Communist Manifesto*, he proposed a more thorough engagement with the national question. In particular, through his discussions with the Indian Marxist MN Roy and others, he came to believe that the nationalisms of the oppressed contained a democratic and potentially emancipatory impulse, and should be brought into the orbit of a socialist project in the age of imperialist conflict and world war. That is, it was a key task of socialists to find ways and means of synchronizing or bringing into articulation the struggles against exploitation with those

against oppression, as neatly captured in the political slogan of the Third International, ‘Workers and Oppressed Peoples of the World, Unite.’<sup>72</sup>

But what Lenin<sup>73</sup>, along with Luxemburg and most Marxists in the West to this day have consistently failed to come to terms with was the corrosive effects of the racisms of imperialism on the European working class. The weight of such racism has consistently served to disorganise and fragment this class blunting its capacity to become an emancipatory collective social force in the field of politics. Must we then follow Fanon in maintaining a deep scepticism about Europe’s capacity to contribute substantively to the historic task of creating ‘the new [hu]man, the whole [hu]man’?<sup>74</sup> In this essay, I have resisted such a temptation by drawing attention to the transformative capacities of two sets of racialized outsiders within the imperialist core who moved towards socialism. Their peculiar social location defined by their residence in the imperialist core combined with their on-going racialization resulting from their colonial heritage endowed such figures with a second sight, a privileged epistemological standpoint which allowed them to see further than other parts of the working class and socialist movement in the West. And at crucial junctures as I have shown, it helped them to see through the usual fog of blood, soil and belonging, and act as a leavening agent, forging solidarity between different racialized stratum of the working class within the West, and connecting the class struggles of such workers with those in the colonies. In doing so, they kept the aim of alternatives to socialist imperialism alive in the West.

And the theoretical and political significance of such a racialized outsider subject position remains as compelling today as it was then. As the social forces driving Brexit mobilise the ideological trope of the white working class to further the development of an anti-immigrant politics, the perspective of the racialized outsider serves as a potential counterweight drawing our attention to a more expansive understanding of class that is cognizant of its multi-ethnic diversity. Seen from its privileged epistemological standpoint, one is pointed towards a more generous and emancipatory political vision, one which through its entanglement of questions of class with race and imperialism promises a path of delivering social justice and equality for all.

If contemporary Marxism is to remain relevant it must find an analytic space to accommodate this collective actor in its thinking, and if it does, it will have helped to stretch Marxism by accommodating the specificity of racism and anti-racism without reducing it to class. The lessons for political practice seem to be equally compelling: if those interpellated identifications of race aren’t just epiphenomenal but materially inscribed social realities which can facilitate resistance against racism, then consideration should be given to decentering class in its classical form in any contemporary projects of transformative social change. ‘Effective democratic mobilizations begin where people are (not where they ‘should

be')<sup>75</sup> The emancipatory politics emanating from such a discussion are more plural – or to put it in today’s terms intersectional - and for a counter hegemonic alliance to be successfully forged would require movement activists to construct narratives and find structures and mechanisms that can help bring action against racism and imperialism into some kind of alignment with struggles against class exploitation. To put it more bluntly, I want to suggest that we have to go through race, not around it, if we are to forge a sustainable solidarity between the ethnically-diverse proletariat in the imperialist core, as well as with those beyond. In that sense, the path to socialism will be more labyrinthine than either Marx or Lenin envisioned.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Brinkley, “Dean Acheson and the ‘Special Relationship’”, 599.
  - <sup>2</sup> Goodwin and Heath, “The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind”, 323-332.
  - <sup>3</sup> See in particular Gilroy, *After Empire*.
  - <sup>4</sup> Farage cited in *The Daily Mail*, 2 April 2014.
  - <sup>5</sup> Farage cited in *The Express*, 21 June 2016.
  - <sup>6</sup> Runnymede Trust, *Who Cares about the White Working Class?*
  - <sup>7</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.
  - <sup>8</sup> Ashcroft, “How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday...and why”
  - <sup>9</sup> Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*. 2-3.
  - <sup>10</sup> Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger*.
  - <sup>11</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 118.
  - <sup>12</sup> Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*.
  - <sup>13</sup> See for example Day and Gaido, *Discovering Imperialism*.
  - <sup>14</sup> Bernstein, cited in Day and Gaido, *Discovering Imperialism*, 11.
  - <sup>15</sup> Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 63.
  - <sup>16</sup> Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*.
  - <sup>17</sup> Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 63-64.
  - <sup>18</sup> See for example Justice, April 25 1896; *ibid* August 26 1899 and Hirshfield, “The Anglo-Boer War and the Issue of Jewish Culpability”.
  - <sup>19</sup> Hirshfield, “The British Left and the ‘Jewish Conspiracy’”, 97.
  - <sup>20</sup> Day and Gaido, *Discovering Imperialism*, 20.
  - <sup>21</sup> Luxemburg, cited in Day and Gaido, *Discovering Imperialism*, 65.
  - <sup>22</sup> Luxemburg cited in Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question*, 49.
  - <sup>23</sup> Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*.
  - <sup>24</sup> Bax cited in Day and Gaido, 13.
  - <sup>25</sup> O’Riordan, “Connolly, Socialism and the Jewish Worker”, 122.
  - <sup>26</sup> Connolly cited in Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 67.
  - <sup>27</sup> Connolly, cited in Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 67
  - <sup>28</sup> Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation*, 231.
  - <sup>29</sup> Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-1921*, 49-54.
  - <sup>30</sup> Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-1921*.
  - <sup>31</sup> Rothstein, cited in Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation*, 232.
  - <sup>32</sup> Trotsky cited in Nelson, *War on War*, 85.
  - <sup>33</sup> Pelling, “The Early History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-29”, 42; Thorpe, “The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945”, 781, Table 1.
  - <sup>34</sup> Pelling, “The Early History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-29”, 42.
  - <sup>35</sup> Morgan, Cohen and Flinn, *Communists and British Society, 1920-1991*, 184.
  - <sup>36</sup> Thorpe, “The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945”.
  - <sup>37</sup> Dutt, “The British Empire”.

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- <sup>38</sup> Dutt, "The British Empire".
- <sup>39</sup> Dutt, "The British Empire".
- <sup>40</sup> CPGB, "Draft Programme of the C.P.G.B. to the Comintern".
- <sup>41</sup> CPGB, "Draft Programme of the C.P.G.B. to the Comintern".
- <sup>42</sup> Dutt, "The British Empire".
- <sup>43</sup> CPGB, "Draft Programme of the C.P.G.B. to the Comintern".
- <sup>44</sup> Callaghan, "The Communists and the Colonies", 17-18.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Marxist*, 2.
- <sup>46</sup> see for example Callaghan, "The Communists and the Colonies", 7.
- <sup>47</sup> Squires, Saklatvala, 176.
- <sup>48</sup> Saklatvala and Pugh, cited in *The Marxist*, 1-2.
- <sup>49</sup> Saklatvala and Pugh, cited in *The Marxist*, 2.
- <sup>50</sup> Squires, Saklatvala, 166.
- <sup>51</sup> MacManus was a staunch antiimperialist and would go onto play a formative role in the League Against Imperialism.
- <sup>52</sup> Hargreaves, "The Comintern and Colonialism".
- <sup>53</sup> Hargreaves, "The Comintern and Colonialism", 256.
- <sup>54</sup> Squires, Saklatvala, 169.
- <sup>55</sup> *The Marxist*, 2.
- <sup>56</sup> Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*.
- <sup>57</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.
- <sup>58</sup> for a related argument about 'choosing the margin as a space of radical openness' see hooks, *Yearning*.
- <sup>59</sup> Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew*, 26.
- <sup>60</sup> Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew*, 30.
- <sup>61</sup> Deutscher *The Non-Jewish Jew*, 33.
- <sup>62</sup> Luxemburg, cited in Day and Gaido, *Discovering Imperialism*, 69.
- <sup>63</sup> Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance", 341.
- <sup>64</sup> Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance", 334.
- <sup>65</sup> Deutscher, "The non-Jewish Jew", 33.
- <sup>66</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- <sup>67</sup> See Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, 66-71.
- <sup>68</sup> Hogsberg, CLR James in Imperial Britain.
- <sup>69</sup> James, "The Negro Question".
- <sup>70</sup> James cited in Young, *Postcolonialism*, 225.
- <sup>71</sup> Anderson cited in Elliot, Perry Anderson: *The Merciless Laboratory of History*, 180.
- <sup>72</sup> Riddell, *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!*
- <sup>73</sup> Lenin, at least, was trying to theoretically come to terms with this and other related discontinuities within the working class through his development of the concept of labour aristocracy and his characterisation of the British proletariat as divided between a favoured minority and a much larger lower stratum (see for example Lenin, "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism").
- <sup>74</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- <sup>75</sup> Clifford, "Taking Identity Politics Seriously: The Contradictory, Stony Ground", 97.

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