

## COMMENT

One of the great turning points in the story of the United States' struggle against racism came when white people watching television all over America saw Sheriff Bull Connor directing an attack, using dogs and high-pressure hoses, against black men, women and children, who were unarmed and unresisting. The confrontation between crude brutality and non-violence shocked many consciences into a realisation of what racism was all about.

It is characteristic of the difference between the United States and Britain that a similar turning-point here has been marked by the appearance on television of a ladylike personality with a fluting voice, and not a hair out of place, genteelly complaining that her culture is being swamped by black immigration.

Of course there was more to it than that. The point of similarity between Bull Connor's television appearance and Mrs. Thatcher's was that both marked a moment after which things would never quite be the same again, after which certain kinds of self-deception and double-talk would have to go. In Britain, ever since 1965, a very large number of white people has held a set of views which can be expressed as follows: "I am a liberal, decent, tolerant sort of person and of course against any sort of racial prejudice. There *are* differences, of course. I always say the trouble is fear of the unknown. Anyway, these people are here now and we ought to be fair to them. But we really cannot let any more of them in. It's not fair to the ones already here. In the interest of good race relations, we have got to keep down (black) immigration. Stop them coming. It's nothing to do with race; it's just that the country is overcrowded. And of course the more of them you have here, the bigger the Problem will be." What Mrs. Thatcher has done is to make plain, at last, that to talk like that is to be a racist. She has forced the question that middle opinion in Britain has so successfully avoided up to now; which side are you really on?

So long as there was a broadly bipartisan policy on immigration (by which British politicians always mean black immigration) agreed between the Labour and Conservative party leaderships, the majority of people in the country felt supported and justified in holding the set of views described above and never needed to question it. And such a bipartisan policy has been followed now, ostensibly in the interest of good race relations, since 1965. It was always clear that as soon as one leadership or the other broke the unspoken pact on the subject, the country at large would be challenged to decide where it stood on race. Many hoped, over the years, that the Labour leadership would return to the principles the party held in 1961 and say clearly that an immigration law

founded on racial discrimination and operated with cruel disregard for black people must be repealed. But instead the Conservative leadership has come out with an open defence of the racial character of our immigration law. It has done so at the beginning of an election year—Mr. Keith Speed's call for an end to immigration was leaked before Mrs Thatcher's broadcast interview and was indeed the occasion of it—in an obvious attempt to gain racist white votes and so stop the swing to Labour which opinion polls had been showing as the economic situation appeared to improve. The pretence that strict immigration control is good for race relations has been cracked open. The publicity which the National Front received in 1977 made clear that there was not much difference between the reason why Front leaders were saying, "Stop immigration" and the reason why other people were saying it. And at least British people had not yet got to the point of believing that the National Front wanted to improve race relations.

But although this turning point allows us a glimpse of some light ahead, it comes at a very gloomy moment in which there is no immediate hope of improvement in the racial situation. Unknown to the general public, the administration of immigration control over the last two years has grown rapidly and frighteningly more severe. In 1977, over 1,500 people were imprisoned in the United Kingdom without trial under the 1971 Immigration Act, many for months on end. Dark-skinned people are constantly asked to produce their passports when they go to government offices about routine business; some people have been refused medical treatment when they failed to produce passports at hospitals. Violence by organised Right-wing groups and by individuals against black people has increased; it is little noted by the Press and is explained away by the police. (In Wolverhampton, for example, where attacks on black youths were causing alarm in late 1977 the police discounted the fact that a number of white youths had been wearing Ku Klux Klan hoods with the disarming suggestion that the hoods were just disguises to avoid identification by police cameras at football matches.) Asian residents in Wolverhampton and parts of London have given up even notifying the police when their windows are broken or burning rags pushed through their front doors. People who beat up blacks are rarely arrested; nothing is done; why bother? Unemployment among black people is proportionately higher than among white, and especially so in the youngest age-group of unemployed. It is not surprising that more West Indians are now leaving Britain than are entering it. The provisions of the Race Relations Acts that are supposed to outlaw incitement to racial hatred have been shown up as a complete sham

continued on page 186

present in Christian thinking: on the contrary, by systematically misunderstanding 'God' as a proper name, he has simply exemplified how Marxists regularly fall into a logical fallacy which, as I pointed out in my own article, is quite foreign to 'scientific theology'. The question then is, why does Marxist discourse so regularly reveal a *need* to use this fallacy in order to make its own case against Christianity? Is this not precisely a proof of its ideological character? What Barker's argument really shows is that there is an ideological element in Marxism itself which can *only* be corrected (especially if, as Althusser insists, the religious question lies at the very heart of the problem of ideology) by recognising the exemption of scientific Christian theology from the realm of the ideological.

---

#### COMMENT contd. from page 151

in the McKinnon judgment, where it was held that the comment, "One down—a million to go", made on the murder of an Indian youth in Southall, was not incitement. The Greater Manchester police spent £250,000 to protect Martin Webster carrying a National Front banner along the street: racial abuse on Front posters and in periodicals produced by a wide range of racist organisations can be uttered with impunity.

In such a situation, why should an obvious lurch by the Conservative leadership towards even more open racism than before appear like a gleam of hope? Because there is a chance now that The Problem will be identified by more and more British people as racism rather than as the presence of black people. Once that simple idea has been grasped, there is a chance that the road will start running in the right direction, even if the going is rough. A House of Commons Select Committee has just produced a report on immigration which is remarkable for its obtuseness, open racism, recommendation for vastly increased police powers and government snooping, and determination to keep Asian families apart as long as possible. Six months ago this document would probably have been greeted with judicious references to the good and bad in it, and to the need for strict immigration control in the cause of—yes, good race relations. But now even the British Press has found this report hard to stomach. There have been adverse comments. Not, of course, universally, not strong enough; still, a turning point has come. Thank you, Bull Thatcher.

Ann Dummett