

## *The Function of Labour Immigration in Western European Capitalism*

The domination of the working masses by a small capitalist ruling class has never been based on violence alone. Capitalist rule is based on a range of mechanisms, some objective products of the economic process, others subjective phenomena arising through manipulation of attitudes. Two such mechanisms, which received considerable attention from the founders of scientific socialism, are the industrial reserve army, which belongs to the first category, and the labour aristocracy, which belongs to the second. These two mechanisms are closely related, as are the objective and subjective factors which give rise to them.

Engels pointed out that 'English manufacture must have, at all times save the brief periods of highest prosperity, an unemployed reserve army of workers, in order to produce the masses of goods required by the market in the liveliest months.'<sup>1</sup> Marx showed that the industrial reserve army or surplus working population is not only the necessary product of capital accumulation and the associated increase in labour productivity, but at the same time 'the lever of

capitalist accumulation', 'a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production'.<sup>2</sup> Only by bringing ever more workers into the production process can the capitalist accumulate capital, which is the precondition for extending production and applying new techniques. These new techniques throw out of work the very men whose labour allowed their application. They are set free to provide a labour reserve which is available to be thrown into other sectors as the interests of the capitalist require. 'The whole form of the movement of modern industry depends, therefore, upon the constant transformation of a part of the labouring population into unemployed or half-employed hands.'<sup>3</sup> The pressure of the industrial reserve army forces those workers who are employed to accept long hours and poor conditions. Above all: 'Taking them as a whole, the general movements of wages are exclusively regulated by the expansion and contraction of the industrial reserve army.'<sup>4</sup> If employment grows and the reserve army contracts, workers are in a better position to demand higher wages. When this happens, profits and capital accumulation diminish, investment falls and men are thrown out of work, leading to a growth of the reserve army and a fall in wages. This is the basis of the capitalist economic cycle. Marx mentions the possibility of the workers seeing through the seemingly natural law of relative over-population, and undermining its effectiveness through trade-union activity directed towards co-operation between the employed and the unemployed.<sup>5</sup>

The labour aristocracy is also described by Engels and Marx. By conceding privileges to certain well-organized sectors of labour, above all to craftsmen (who by virtue of their training could not be readily replaced by members of the industrial reserve army), the capitalists were able to undermine class consciousness and secure an opportunist non-revolutionary leadership for these sectors.<sup>6</sup> Special advantages, sometimes taking the form of symbols of higher status (different clothing, salary instead of wages, etc) rather than higher material rewards, were also conferred upon foremen and non-manual workers, with the aim of distinguishing them from other workers and causing them to identify their interests with those of the capitalists. Engels pointed out that the privileges given to some British workers were possible because of the vast profits made by the capitalists through domination of the world market and imperialist exploitation of labour in other countries.<sup>7</sup> Lenin emphasized the effects of imperialism on class consciousness: 'Imperialism . . . makes it economically possible to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters, gives shape to, and strengthens opportunism.'<sup>8</sup> ' . . . A section of the proletariat allows itself to be led by men bought by, or at least paid by, the bourgeoisie', and the result is a

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<sup>1</sup> Engels, 'The Condition of the Working Class in England', in Marx and Engels, *On Britain*, Moscow 1962, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow 1961, p. 632.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 633.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 637.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 640.

<sup>6</sup> Engels, Preface to the English edition of 'The Condition of the Working Class in England', op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Engels, 'The English Elections', in *On Britain*, op. cit., p. 505.

<sup>8</sup> Lenin, *Imperialism—the highest Stage of Capitalism*, Moscow 1966, pp. 96–7.

split among the workers and 'temporary decay in the working-class movement'.<sup>9</sup>

The industrial reserve army and the labour aristocracy have not lost their importance as mechanisms of domination in the current phase of organized monopoly capitalism. However, the way in which they function has undergone important changes. In particular the maintenance of an industrial reserve army within the developed capitalist countries of West Europe has become increasingly difficult. With the growth of the labour movement after the First World War, economic crises and unemployment began to lead to political tensions which threatened the existence of the capitalist system. Capitalism responded by setting up fascist régimes in the areas where it was most threatened, in order to suppress social conflict through violence. The failure of this strategy, culminating in the defeat of fascism in 1945, was accompanied by the reinforcement of the non-capitalist bloc in East Europe and by a further strengthening of the labour movement in West Europe. In order to survive, the capitalist system had to aim for continuous expansion and full employment at any price. But full employment strikes at a basic principle of the capitalist economy: the use of the industrial reserve army to keep wages down and profits up. A substitute for the traditional form of reserve army had to be found, for without it capitalist accumulation is impossible. Moreover, despite Keynesian economics, it is not possible completely to avoid the cyclical development of the capitalist economy. It was therefore necessary to find a way of cushioning the effects of crises, so as to hinder the development of dangerous social tensions.

### Immigrants as the New Industrial Reserve Army

The solution to these problems adopted by West European capitalism has been the employment of immigrant workers from under-developed areas of Southern Europe or from the Third World.<sup>10</sup> Today, the unemployed masses of these areas form a 'latent surplus-population'<sup>11</sup> or

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

<sup>10</sup> In this article we examine the function of labour migration only for the countries of immigration. Migration also plays an important stabilizing role for the reactionary régimes of the countries of origin—a role which is understood and to some extent planned by the ruling class in West Europe. Although we are concerned only with West Europe in this article, it is important to note that the use of certain special categories of workers, who can be discriminated against without arousing general solidarity from other workers, is a general feature of modern capitalism. The blacks and chicanos are the industrial reserve army of the USA, the Africans of white-dominated Southern Africa. Current attempts by 'liberal' capitalists to relax the colour bar to allow blacks into certain skilled and white-collar jobs, both in the USA and South Africa, however estimable in humanitarian terms, are designed mainly to weaken the unions and put pressure on wages in these sectors.

<sup>11</sup> Marx mentions several forms taken by the industrial reserve army. One is the 'latent' surplus-population of agricultural labourers, whose wages and conditions have been depressed to such an extent that they are merely waiting for a favourable opportunity to move into industry and join the urban proletariat. (*Capital*, Vol. I., op. cit., p. 642.) Although these workers are not yet in industry, the possibility that they may at any time join the industrial labour force increases the capitalist's ability to resist wage increases. The latent industrial reserve army has the same effect as the urban unemployed. Unemployed workers in other countries, in so far as they may be brought into the industrial labour force whenever required, clearly form a latent industrial reserve army in the same way as rural unemployed within the country.

reserve army, which can be imported into the developed countries as the interests of the capitalist class dictate. In addition to this economic function, the employment of immigrant workers has an important socio-political function for capitalism: by creating a split between immigrant and indigenous workers along national and racial lines and offering better conditions and status to indigenous workers, it is possible to give large sections of the working class the consciousness of a labour aristocracy.

The employment of immigrant workers in the capitalist production process is not a new phenomenon. The Irish played a vital part in British industrialization. Not only did they provide a special form of labour for heavy work of a temporary nature on railways, canals and roads;<sup>12</sup> their competition also forced down wages and conditions for other workers. Engels described Irish immigration as a 'cause of abasement to which the English worker is exposed, a cause permanently active in forcing the whole class downwards'.<sup>13</sup> Marx described the antagonism between British and Irish workers, artificially created by the mass media of the ruling class, as 'the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite their organization'.<sup>14</sup> As industrialization got under way in France, Germany and Switzerland in the latter half of the 19th century, these countries too brought in foreign labour: from Poland, Italy and Spain. There were 800,000 foreign workers in the German Reich in 1907. More than a third of the Ruhr miners were Poles. Switzerland had half a million foreigners in 1910—15 per cent of her total population. French heavy industry was highly dependent on immigrant labour right up to the Second World War. According to Lenin, one of the special features of imperialism was 'the decline in emigration from imperialist countries and the increase in immigration into these countries from the more backward countries where lower wages are paid'.<sup>15</sup> This was a main cause of the division of the working class. The fascist form of capitalism also developed its own specific form of exploiting immigrant workers: the use of forced labour. No less than 7½ million deportees from occupied countries and prisoners of war were working in Germany by 1944, replacing the men recruited for the army. About a quarter of German munitions production was carried out by foreign labour.<sup>16</sup>

Compared with early patterns, immigration of workers to contemporary West Europe has two new features. The first is its character as a permanent part of the economic structure. Previously, immigrant labour was used more or less temporarily when the domestic industrial reserve army was inadequate for some special reason, like war or unusually fast expansion; since 1945, however, large numbers of immigrant workers have taken up key positions in the productive process, so that even in the case of recession their labour cannot be dispensed with. The second

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<sup>12</sup> See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth 1968, pp. 469–85.

<sup>13</sup> 'The Condition of the Working Class in England', op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, 9 April 1870, in *On Britain*, op. cit., p. 552.

<sup>15</sup> *Imperialism*, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Pfahlmann, *Fremdarbeiter und Kriegsgefangene in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft, 1939–1945*, Darmstadt 1968, p. 232.

is its importance as the basis of the modern industrial reserve army. Other groups which might conceivably fulfil the same function—non-working women, the disabled and the chronic sick, members of the lumpenproletariat whose conditions prevent them from working,<sup>17</sup> have already been integrated into the production process to the extent to which this is profitable for the capitalist system. The use of further reserves of this type would require costly social measures (e.g. adequate kindergartens). The main traditional form of the industrial reserve army—men thrown out of work by rationalization and cyclical crises—is hardly available today, for reasons already mentioned. Thus immigration is of key importance for the capitalist system.

### The Development of Immigration since 1945

There are around eleven million immigrants<sup>18</sup> living in West Europe, making up about 5 per cent of total population. Relatively few have gone to industrially less developed countries like Norway, Austria and Denmark, while large concentrations are to be found in highly industrialized countries like Belgium, Sweden, West Germany, France, Switzerland and Britain. Our analysis concentrates on the four last-named which have about 90 per cent of all immigrants in West Europe between them.

#### *Immigrants in West Germany, France, Switzerland and Britain*<sup>19</sup>

	Immigrants (thousands)	Immigrants as percentage of total population	Date of figures (latest available)
West Germany	2,977	4.8	September 1970
France	3,177	6.4	December 1969
Switzerland	972	16.0	December 1969
Britain	2,603	5.0	1966

Most immigrants in Germany and Switzerland come from Southern Europe. The main groups in Germany are Italians (574,000 in 1970), Yugoslavs (515,000), Turks (469,000), Greeks (343,000) and Spaniards (246,000). In Switzerland, the Italians are by far the largest group (532,000 in 1969) followed by Germans (116,000) and Spaniards (98,000). France and Britain also have considerable numbers of European immigrants, but in addition large contingents from former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. France has 617,000 Spaniards, 612,000 Italians, 480,000 Portuguese, as well as 608,000 Algerians, 143,000

<sup>17</sup> For the role of the lumpenproletariat in the industrial reserve army, see *Capital*, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 643.

<sup>18</sup> We use 'immigrants' in a broad sense to include all persons living in a West European country which is not their country of birth. Much migration is of a temporary nature, for a period of 3–10 years. But such temporary migration has effects similar to permanent migration when the returning migrant is replaced by a countryman with similar characteristics. Such migrants may be regarded as a permanent social group with rotating membership.

<sup>19</sup> For sources, as well as a detailed analysis of social conditions of immigrants, see Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, London, Oxford University Press for Institute of Race Relations, 1972 (forthcoming).

Moroccans, 89,000 Tunisians, about 55,000 black Africans and an unknown number (probably about 200,000) from the remaining colonies (euphemistically referred to as Overseas Departments) in the West Indies and the African island of Réunion. The largest immigrant group in Britain comes from the Irish Republic (739,000 in 1966). Most of the other Europeans were displaced persons and the like who came during and after the war: Germans (142,000), Poles (118,000). Cypriots number 60,000. There are also an increasing number of South Europeans, often allowed in on a short-term basis for work in catering and domestic service. Coloured immigrants comprise about one third of the total, the largest groups coming from the West Indies (269,000 in 1966), India (240,000) and Pakistan (75,000).<sup>20</sup>

The migratory movements and the government policies which direct them reflect the growing importance and changing function of immigrant labour in West Europe. Immediately after the Second World War, Switzerland, Britain and France recruited foreign workers. Switzerland needed extra labour for the export boom permitted by her intact industry in the middle of war-torn Europe. The 'European Voluntary Workers' in Britain (initially displaced persons, later Italians) were assigned to specific jobs connected with industrial reconstruction. The reconstruction boom was not expected to last. Both Switzerland and Britain imposed severe restrictions on foreign workers, designed to stop them from settling and bringing in their families, so that they could be dismissed and deported at the least sign of recession. France was something of an exception: her immigration policy was concerned not only with labour needs for reconstruction, but also with permanent immigration to counteract the demographic effects of the low birth-rate.

When West German industry got under way again after the 1949 Currency Reform there was at first no need for immigrants from Southern Europe. An excellent industrial reserve army was provided by the seven million expellees from the former Eastern provinces of the Reich and by the three million refugees from East Germany, many of whom were skilled workers. Throughout the fifties, the presence of these reserves kept wage-growth slow and hence provided the basis for the 'economic miracle'. By the mid-fifties, however, special labour shortages were appearing, first in agriculture and building. It was then that recruitment of foreign workers (initially on a seasonal basis<sup>21</sup>) was started. Here too, an extremely restrictive policy was followed with

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<sup>20</sup> The 1966 Census figures are at present the most recent ones available. It should, however, be noted that, for technical reasons, they seriously under-enumerate the Commonwealth immigrants in Britain. Moreover, the number has grown considerably since 1966, particularly if we look at the whole community including children born to Commonwealth immigrants in Britain, who were not counted by the census. We shall have to wait for the results of the 1971 Census to obtain a more accurate picture of the immigrant population in Britain.

<sup>21</sup> Many foreign workers are still employed on a seasonal basis in building, agriculture and catering in France and Switzerland. This is a special form of exploitation. The worker has no income in the off-season and is therefore forced to work very long hours for the 9–10 months when he does have work. He cannot bring his family with him, he has even more limited civic rights than other immigrants, and he has absolutely no security, for there is no guarantee that his employment will be continued from year to year.

regard to family entry and long-term settlement. 'Rotation' of the foreign labour force was encouraged. In this stage, the use of immigrants in the countries mentioned followed the pre-war pattern: they were brought in to satisfy special and, it was thought, temporary labour needs in certain sectors. They were, as an official of the German employers' association put it, 'a mobile labour potential'.<sup>22</sup>

By the sixties, the situation was changing. Despite mild cyclical tendencies it was clear that there was not going to be a sudden return to the pre-war boom-slump pattern. The number of immigrant workers grew extremely rapidly in the late fifties and early sixties. Between 1956 and 1965 nearly one million new workers entered France. The number of foreign workers in West Germany increased from 279,000 in 1960 to over 1.3 million in 1966. In Switzerland there were 326,000 immigrant workers (including seasonals) in 1956, and 721,000 in 1964. This was also the period of mass immigration to Britain from the Commonwealth.<sup>23</sup> The change was not merely quantitative: immigrants were moving into and becoming indispensable in ever more sectors of the economy. They were no longer filling gaps in peripheral branches like agriculture and building but were becoming a vital part of the labour force in key industries like engineering and chemicals. Moreover, there was growing competition between the different countries to obtain the 'most desirable' immigrants, i.e. those with the best education and the least cultural distance from the receiving countries. The growing need for labour was forcing the recruiters to go further and further afield: Turkey and Yugoslavia were replacing Italy as Germany's main labour source. Portugal and North Africa were replacing Italy and Spain in the case of France.

As a result, new policies intended to attract and integrate immigrant workers, but also to control them better, were introduced. One such measure was the free labour movement policy of the EEC, designed to increase the availability of the rural proletariat of Sicily and the Mezzogiorno to West European capital.<sup>24</sup> Germany and Switzerland liberalized the conditions for family entry and long-term settlement, while at the same time tightening political control through measures such as the German 1965 Foreigners Law. France tried to increase control over entries, in order to prevent the large-scale clandestine immigration which had taken place throughout the fifties and sixties (and still does, despite the new policy). At the same time restrictions were made on the permanent settlement of non-Europeans—officially because of their 'greater difficulties in integrating'. In Britain, racialist campaigns led to the stopping of unrestricted Commonwealth immigration in 1962. By limiting the labour supply, this measure contradicted the economic interests of the ruling class. The new Immigration Act of 1971, which

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<sup>22</sup> Ulrich Freiherr von Gienanth, in *Der Arbeitgeber*, Vol. 18, 20 March 1966, p. 153.

<sup>23</sup> For Commonwealth immigration see E. J. B. Rose et al., *Colour and Citizenship*, London 1969.

<sup>24</sup> Eurocrats refer to the free movement policy as the beginning of a 'European labour market'. But although EEC citizens have the right to choose which country to be exploited in, they lack any civic or political rights once there. Moreover, the Southern Italian labour reserves are being absorbed by the monopolies of Turin and Milan, so that intra-EEC migration is steadily declining in volume, while migration from outside the EEC increases.

could provide the basis for organized and controlled labour recruitment on the German and French pattern, is a corrective, although its application for this purpose is not at present required, since the ruling class has created an internal industrial reserve army through unemployment.

In view of the stagnant domestic labour force potential and the long-term growth trend of the economy, immigrant labour has become a structural necessity for West European capitalism.<sup>25</sup> It has a dual function today.<sup>26</sup> One section is maintained as a mobile fluctuating labour force, which can be moved from factory to factory or branch to branch as required by the development of the means of production, and which can be thrown out of work and deported as required without causing social tensions. This function was shown clearly by the West German recession of 1966–7, when the foreign labour force dropped by 400,000, although there were never more than 29,000 receiving unemployment benefit. As a United Nations study pointed out, West Germany was able to export unemployment to the home countries of the migrants.<sup>27</sup> The other section is required for permanent employment throughout the economy. They are offered better conditions and the chance of long-term settlement.<sup>28</sup> Despite this they still fulfil the function of an industrial reserve army, for they are given inferior jobs, have no political rights and may be used as a constant threat to the wages and conditions of the local labour force.

### Occupational Position

The immigrant percentage of the population given in the table above in no way reflects the contribution of immigrants to the economy. They are mainly young men, whose dependents are sent for later if at all. Many of them remain only a few years, and are then replaced by others, so that there are hardly any retired immigrants. Immigrants therefore have higher than average rates of economic activity, and make contributions to health, unemployment and pension insurance far in excess of their demands on such schemes.<sup>29</sup> Particularly high rates of activity are to be found among recently arrived groups, or among those who for

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<sup>25</sup> Where formalized economic planning exists, this necessity has been publicly formulated. Prognoses on the contribution of immigrants to the labour force were included in the Fourth and Fifth Five-Year Plans in France, and play an even more prominent part in the current Sixth Plan. See *Le VI<sup>e</sup> plan et les travailleurs étrangers*, Paris 1971.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ruth Becker, Gerhard Dörr, K. H. Tjaden, 'Fremdarbeiterbeschäftigung im deutschen Kapitalismus', *Das Argument*, December 1971, p. 753.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, *Economic Survey of Europe 1967*, Geneva 1968, Chapter I, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> The distinction between the two sections of the immigrant labour force is formalized in the new French immigration policy introduced in 1968. There are separate regulations for South Europeans, who are encouraged to bring in their families and settle permanently, and Africans (particularly Algerians) who are meant to come for a limited period only, without dependents.

<sup>29</sup> It is estimated that foreign workers in Germany are at present paying about 17 per cent of all contributions to pension insurance, but that foreigners are receiving only 0.5 per cent of the total benefits. Heinz Salowsky, 'Sozialpolitische Aspekte der Ausländerbeschäftigung', *Berichte des Deutschen Industrie instituts zur Sozialpolitik*, Vol. 6 (S), No. 2, February 1972, pp. 16–22.

social and cultural reasons tend not to bring dependents with them: Portuguese and North Africans in France, Turks in Germany and Pakistanis in Britain. Immigrant workers are about 6.5 per cent of the labour force in Britain, 7–8 per cent in France, 10 per cent in West Germany and 30 per cent in Switzerland. Even these figures do not show adequately the structural importance of immigrant labour, which is concentrated in certain areas and types of work.

The overwhelming majority of immigrants live in highly industrialized and fast-growing urban areas like Paris, the Lyon region, the Ruhr, Baden-Württemberg, London and the West Midlands. For example 31.2 per cent of all immigrants in France live in the Paris region, compared with only 19.2 per cent of the total population. 9.5 per cent of the inhabitants of the Paris region are immigrants.<sup>30</sup> In Britain more than one third of all immigrants are to be found in Greater London compared with one sixth of the total population. Immigrants make up 12 per cent of London's population.<sup>31</sup>

More important still is the concentration in certain industries. Switzerland is the extreme case: the whole industrial sector is dominated by foreign workers who make up more than 40 per cent of the factory labour force. In many branches—for instance textiles, clothing, building and catering—they outnumber Swiss employees.<sup>32</sup> Of the nearly two million foreign workers in Germany in September 1970, 38.5 per cent were in the metal-producing and engineering industry, 24.2 in other manufacturing branches and 16.7 per cent in building. Foreign workers accounted for 13.7 per cent of total employment in metal producing and engineering. The proportion was even higher in some industries with particularly bad working conditions, like plastic, rubber and asbestos manufacture (18.4 per cent). In building, foreign workers were 17.5 per cent of the labour force. On the other hand they made up only 3.4 per cent of all employees in the services, although their share was much higher in catering (14.8 per cent).<sup>33</sup> Similar concentrations were revealed by the 1968 Census in France: 35.6 per cent of immigrant men were employed in building and 13.5 per cent in engineering and electrical goods. 28.8 per cent of foreign women were domestic servants. In Britain the concentration of immigrants in certain industries is less marked, and different immigrant groups have varying patterns. The Irish are concentrated in construction, while Commonwealth immigrants are over-represented in metal manufacture and transport. Pakistani men are mainly to be found in the textile industry and Cypriots in clothing and footwear and in distribution. European immigrants are frequently in the services sector. Immigrant women of all nationalities tend to work in services, although some groups (Cypriots, West Indians) also often work in manufacturing.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Calculated from: 'Statistiques du Ministère de l'Intérieur', *Hommes et Migrations: Documents*, No. 788, 15 May 1970; and *Annuaire Statistique de la France* 1968.

<sup>31</sup> 1966 Census.

<sup>32</sup> *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Schweiz* 1967, pp. 140–1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ausländische Arbeitnehmer* 1970, Nürnberg 1971.

<sup>34</sup> 1966 Census. For a detailed analysis of immigrants' employment see: K. Jones and A. D. Smith, *The Economic Impact of Commonwealth Immigration*, Cambridge 1970. Also *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, op. cit., Ch. III.

In general immigrants are concentrated in certain basic industries, where they form a high proportion of the labour force. Together with their geographical concentration this means that immigrant workers are of great importance in the very type of enterprise and area which used to be regarded as the strongholds of the class-conscious proletariat. The real concentration is even greater than the figures show, for within each industry the immigrants tend to have become predominant in certain departments and occupations. There can be hardly a foundry in West Europe in which immigrants do not form a majority, or at least a high proportion, of the labour force. The same applies to monotonous production line work, such as car-assembly. Renault, Citroen, Volkswagen, Ford of Cologne and Opel all have mainly foreign workers on the assembly line (The British motor industry is an exception in this respect).

Perhaps the best indication of the occupational concentration of the immigrant labour force is given by their socio-economic distribution. For instance a survey carried out in 1968 in Germany showed that virtually no Southern Europeans are in non-manual employment. Only between 7 per cent and 16 per cent of the various nationalities were skilled workers while between 80 per cent and 90 per cent were either semi-skilled or unskilled.<sup>35</sup> By comparison about a third of German workers are non-manual, and among manual workers between one third and one half are in the skilled category in the various industries. In France a survey carried out at Lyon in 1967 found that where they worked in the same industry, the French were mainly in managerial, non-manual or skilled occupations, while the immigrants were concentrated in manual occupations, particularly semi-skilled and unskilled ones. The relegation to unskilled jobs is particularly marked for North Africans and Portuguese.<sup>36</sup> In Britain, only about 26 per cent of the total labour force fall into the unskilled and semi-skilled manual categories, but the figure is 42 per cent for the Irish, 50 per cent for the Jamaicans, 65 per cent for the Pakistanis and 55 per cent for the Italians.<sup>37</sup>

Immigrants form the lowest stratum of the working class carrying out unskilled and semi-skilled work in those industrial sectors with the worst working conditions and/or the lowest pay.<sup>38</sup> The entry of immigrants at the bottom of the labour market has made possible the release of many indigenous workers from such employment, and their promotion to jobs with better conditions and higher status, i.e. skilled,

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<sup>35</sup> *Ausländische Arbeitnehmer* 1969, Nürnberg 1970, p. 86.

<sup>36</sup> 'L'insertion sociale des étrangers dans l'aire métropolitaine Lyon-Saint-Étienne', *Hommes et Migrations*, No. 113, 1969, p. 112.

<sup>37</sup> 1966 Census.

<sup>38</sup> Some employers—particularly small inefficient ones—specialize in the exploitation of immigrants. For instance they employ illegal immigrants, who can be forced to work for very low wages and cannot complain to the authorities for fear of deportation. Such cases often cause much indignation in the liberal and social-democratic press. But, in fact, it is the big efficient firms exploiting immigrants in a legal and relatively humane way which make the biggest profits out of them. The function of immigration in West European capitalism is created not by the malpractices of backward firms (many of whom incidentally could not survive without immigrant labour), but by the most advanced sectors of big industry which plan and utilize the position of immigrant workers to their own advantage.

supervisory or white-collar employment. Apart from the economic effects, this process has a profound impact on the class consciousness of the indigenous workers concerned. This will be discussed in more detail below.

### Social Position

The division of the working class within the production process is duplicated by a division in other spheres of society. The poor living conditions of immigrants have attracted too much liberal indignation and welfare zeal to need much description here. Immigrants get the worst types of housing: in Britain slums and run-down lodging houses, in France *bidonvilles* (shanty-towns) and overcrowded hotels, in Germany and Switzerland camps of wooden huts belonging to the employers and attics in the cities. It is rare for immigrants to get council houses. Immigrants are discriminated against by many landlords, so that those who do specialize in housing them can charge extortionate rents for inadequate facilities. In Germany and France, official programmes have been established to provide hostel accommodation for single immigrant workers. These hostels do provide somewhat better material conditions. On the other hand they increase the segregation of immigrant workers from the rest of the working class, deny them any private life, and above all put them under the control of the employers 24 hours a day.<sup>39</sup> In Germany the employers have repeatedly attempted to use control over immigrants' accommodation to force them to act as strike-breakers.

Language and vocational training courses for immigrant workers are generally provided only when it is absolutely necessary for the production process, as in mines for example. Immigrant children are also at a disadvantage: they tend to live in run-down overcrowded areas where school facilities are poorest. No adequate measures are taken to deal with their special educational problems (e.g. language difficulties), so that their educational performance is usually below-average. As a result of their bad working and living conditions, immigrants have serious health problems. For instance they have much higher tuberculosis rates than the rest of the population virtually everywhere.<sup>40</sup> As there are health controls at the borders, it is clear that such illnesses have been contracted in West Europe rather than being brought in by the immigrants.

The inferior work-situation and living conditions of immigrants have caused some bourgeois sociologists to define them as a 'lumpen-

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<sup>39</sup> 'So far as we are concerned, hostel and works represent parts of a single whole. The hostels belong to the mines, so the foreign workers are in our charge from start to finish', stated a representative of the German mining employers proudly. *Magnet Bundesrepublik*, Informationstagung der Bundesvereinigung Deutscher Arbeitgeberverbände, Bonn 1966, p. 81.

<sup>40</sup> A group of French doctors found that the TB rate for black Africans in the Paris suburb of Montreuil was 156 times greater than that of the rest of the local population. R. D. Nicoladze, C. Rendu, G. Millet, 'Coupable d'être malades', *Droit et Liberté*, No. 280, March 1969, p. 8. For further examples see *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, op. cit., Ch.VIII.

proletariat' or a 'marginal group'. This is clearly incorrect. A group which makes up 10, 20 or 30 per cent of the industrial labour force cannot be regarded as marginal to society. Others speak of a 'new proletariat' or a 'sub-proletariat'. Such terms are also wrong. The first implies that the indigenous workers have ceased to be proletarians and have been replaced by the immigrants in this social position. The second postulates that immigrant workers have a different relationship to the means of production than that traditionally characteristic of the proletariat. In reality both indigenous and immigrant workers share the same relationship to the means of production: they are excluded from ownership or control; they are forced to sell their labour power in order to survive; they work under the direction and in the interests of others. In the sphere of consumption both categories of workers are subject to the laws of the commodity market, where the supply and price of goods is determined not by their use value but by their profitability for capitalists; both are victims of landlords, retail monopolists and similar bloodsuckers and manipulators of the consumption-terror. These are the characteristics typical of the proletariat ever since the industrial revolution, and on this basis immigrant and indigenous workers must be regarded as members of the same class: the proletariat. But it is a divided class: the marginal privileges conceded to indigenous workers and the particularly intensive exploitation of immigrants combine to create a barrier between the two groups, which appear as distinct strata within the class. The division is deepened by certain legal, political and psychological factors, which will be discussed below.

### Discrimination

Upon arrival in West Europe, immigrants from under-developed areas have little basic education or vocational training, and are usually ignorant of the language. They know nothing of prevailing market conditions or prices. In capitalist society, these characteristics are sufficient to ensure that immigrants get poor jobs and social conditions. After a period of adaptation to industrial work and urban life, the prevailing ideology would lead one to expect many immigrants to obtain better jobs, housing, etc. Special mechanisms ensure that this does not happen in the majority of cases. On the one hand there is institutionalized discrimination in the form of legislation which restricts immigrants' civic and labour market rights. On the other hand there are informal discriminatory practices based on racialism or xenophobia.

In nearly all West European countries, labour market legislation discriminates against foreigners. They are granted labour permits for a specific job in a certain firm for a limited period. They do not have the right to move to better-paid or more highly qualified positions, at least for some years. Workers who change jobs without permission are often deported. Administrative practices in this respect have been liberalized to some extent in Germany and Switzerland in recent years, due to the need for immigrant labour in a wider range of occupations, but the basic restrictiveness of the system remains. In Britain, Commonwealth immigrants (once admitted to the country) and the Irish had equal rights with local workers until the 1971 Immigration Act. Now Commonwealth immigrants will have the same labour market situation

as aliens. The threat of deportation if an immigrant loses his job is a very powerful weapon for the employer. Immigrants who demand better conditions can be sacked for indiscipline and the police will do the rest.<sup>41</sup> Regulations which restrict family entry and permanent settlement also keep immigrants in inferior positions. If a man may stay only for a few years, it is not worth his while to learn the language and take vocational training courses.

Informal discrimination is well known in Britain, where it takes the form of the colour bar. The PEP study,<sup>42</sup> as well as many other investigations, has shown that coloured immigrants encounter discrimination with regard to employment, housing and the provision of services such as mortgages and insurance. The more qualified a coloured man is, the more likely he is to encounter discrimination. This mechanism keeps immigrants in 'their place', i.e. doing the dirty, unpleasant jobs. Immigrants in the other European countries also encounter informal discrimination. Immigrants rarely get promotion to supervisory or non-manual jobs, even when they are well-qualified. Discrimination in housing is widespread. In Britain, adverts specifying 'no coloured' are forbidden, but in Germany or Switzerland one still frequently sees 'no foreigners'.

The most serious form of discrimination against immigrant workers is their deprivation of political rights. Foreigners may not vote in local or national elections. Nor may they hold public office, which in France is defined so widely as to include trade-union posts. Foreigners do not generally have the same rights as local workers with regard to eligibility for works councils and similar representative bodies. The main exception to this formal exclusion from political participation concerns Irish and Commonwealth immigrants in Britain, who do have the right to vote (the same will not apply to those who enter under the 1971 Act). But the Mangrove case shows the type of repression which may be expected by any immigrants who dare to organize themselves. Close police control over the political activities of immigrants is the rule throughout Europe, and deportations of political and trade-union militants are common. After the May Events in France, hundreds of foreign workers were deported.<sup>43</sup> Foreign language newspapers of the CGT labour federation have been repeatedly forbidden. The German Foreigners Law of 1965 lays down that the political activity of foreigners can be forbidden if 'important interests of the German Federal Republic require this'—a provision so flexible that the police can prevent any activity they choose. Even this is not regarded as sufficient. When Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt visited Iran in March 1972 to do an oil deal, the Shah complained strongly about Iranian students being allowed to criticize him in Germany. The Greek and Yugoslav ambassadors have also protested about the activities of their citizens. Now the German Government is working on a new law which would go so

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<sup>41</sup> For a description of how a strike of Spanish workers in a steel-works was broken by the threat of deportation, see P. Gavi, *Les Ouvriers*, Paris 1970, pp. 225–6.

<sup>42</sup> W. W. Daniels, *Racial Discrimination in England*, based on the PEP Report, Harmondsworth 1968.

<sup>43</sup> See *Review of the International Commission of Jurists*, No. 3, September 1969, and *Migration Today*, No. 13, Autumn 1969.

far as to make police permission necessary even for private meetings of foreigners in closed rooms.<sup>44</sup>

### Prejudice and Class Consciousness

Discrimination against immigrants is a reflection of widespread hostility towards them. In Britain, this is regarded as 'colour prejudice' or 'racialism', and indeed there can be no doubt that the hostility of large sections of the population is at present directed against black people. Race relations theorists attribute the problems connected with immigration partly to the immigrants' difficulties in adapting to the prevailing norms of the 'host society', and partly to the indigenous population's inbred distrust of the newcomers who can be distinguished by their skin colour. The problems are abstracted from the socio-economic structure and reduced to the level of attitudes. Solutions are to be sought not through political action, but through psychological and educational strategies.<sup>45</sup> But a comparison of surveys carried out in different countries shows that hostility towards immigrants is everywhere as great as in Britain, even where the immigrants are white.<sup>46</sup> The Italian who moves to the neighbouring country of Switzerland is as unpopular as the Asian in Britain. This indicates that hostility is based on the position of immigrants in society and not on the colour of their skin.

Racialism and xenophobia are products of the capitalist national state and of its imperialist expansion.<sup>47</sup> Their principal historical function was to split the working class on the international level, and to motivate one section to help exploit another in the interests of the ruling class. Today such ideologies help to deepen the split within the working class in West Europe. Many indigenous workers do not perceive that they share a common class position and class interests with immigrant workers. The basic fact of having the same relationship to the means of production is obscured by the local workers' marginal advantages with regard to material conditions and status. The immigrants are regarded not as class comrades, but as alien intruders who pose an economic and social threat. It is feared that they will take away the jobs of local labour, that they will be used by the employers to force down wages and to break strikes.<sup>48</sup> Whatever the behaviour of the immigrant workers—

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Der Spiegel*, No. 7, 7 February 1972.

<sup>45</sup> See Mark Abrams' study on prejudice in *Colour and Citizenship*, pp. 551–604. The results of the study are very interesting, but require careful interpretation. The interpretation given by Abrams is extremely misleading. The results of the prejudice study, which was said to indicate a very low level of prejudice in Britain, attracted more public attention than all the other excellent contributions in this book. For a re-analysis of Abrams' material see Christopher Bagley, *Social Structure and Prejudice in five English Boroughs*, London 1970.

<sup>46</sup> We have attempted such a comparison in *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, op. cit., Chapter IX. Historical comparisons also tend to throw doubt on the importance of race as a cause of prejudice: white immigrants like the Irish were in the past received just as hostilely as the black immigrants today.

<sup>47</sup> Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class and Race*, New York 1970, p. 317 ff. This superb work of Marxist scholarship is recommended to anyone interested in racialism.

<sup>48</sup> Surveys carried out in Germany in 1966 show a growth of hostility towards immigrants. This was directly related to the impending recession and local labour's fear of unemployment.

and in fact they almost invariably show solidarity with their indigenous colleagues—such fears are not without a basis. It is indeed the strategy of the employers to use immigration to put pressure on wages and to weaken the labour movement.<sup>49</sup> The very social and legal weakness of the immigrants is a weapon in the hands of the employers. Other points of competition are to be found outside work, particularly on the housing market. The presence of immigrants is often regarded as the cause of rising rents and increased overcrowding in the cities. By making immigrants the scapegoats for the insecurity and inadequate conditions which the capitalist system inevitably provides for workers, attention is diverted from the real causes.

Workers often adopt racialism as a defence mechanism against a real or apparent threat to their conditions. It is an incorrect response to a real problem. By preventing working-class unity, racialism assists the capitalists in their strategy of 'divide and rule'. The function of racialism in the capitalist system is often obscured by the fact that racist campaigns usually have petty-bourgeois leadership and direct their slogans against the big industrialists. The Schwarzenbach Initiative in Switzerland—which called for the deportation of a large proportion of the immigrant population—is an example,<sup>50</sup> as are Enoch Powell's campaigns for repatriation. Such demands are opposed by the dominant sections of the ruling class. The reason is clear: a complete acceptance of racialism would prevent the use of immigrants as an industrial reserve army. But despite this, racist campaigns serve the interests of the ruling class: they increase tension between indigenous and immigrant workers and weaken the labour movement. The large working-class following gained by Powell in his racist campaigns demonstrates how dangerous they are. Paradoxically, their value for capitalism lies in their very failure to achieve their declared aims.

The presence of immigrant workers is one of the principal factors contributing to the lack of class consciousness among large sections of the working class. The existence of a new lower stratum of immigrants changes the worker's perception of his own position in society. Instead of a dichotomic view of society, in which the working masses confront a small capitalist ruling class, many workers now see themselves as belonging to an intermediate stratum, superior to the unskilled immigrant workers. Such a consciousness is typified by an hierarchical view of society and by orientation towards advancement through individual achievement and competition, rather than through solidarity and collective action. This is the mentality of the labour aristocracy and leads to opportunism and the temporary decay of the working-class movement.

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<sup>49</sup>Historically, the best example of this strategy was the use of successive waves of immigrants to break the nascent labour movement in the USA and to follow extremely rapid capital accumulation. *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair gives an excellent account of this. Similar was the use of internal migrants (the 'Okies') in California in the thirties—see John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

<sup>50</sup>Although the Federal Council, the Parliament, the employers, the unions and all the major parties called for rejection of the Schwarzenbach Initiative, it was defeated only by a small majority: 46 per cent of voters supported the Initiative and 54 per cent voted against it.

## Immigration and Society

The impact of immigration on contemporary West European society may now be summarized.

*Economic effects:* the new industrial reserve army of immigrant workers is a major stabilizing factor of the capitalist economy. By restraining wage increases, immigration is a vital precondition for capital accumulation and hence for growth. In the long run, wages may grow more in a country which has large-scale immigration than in one which does not, because of the dynamic effect of increased capital accumulation on productivity. However, wages are a smaller share, and profits a larger share of national income than would have been the case without immigration.<sup>51</sup> The best illustration of this effect is obtained by comparing the German and the British economies since 1945. Germany has had large and continuous increases in labour force due to immigration. At first wages were held back. The resulting capital accumulation allowed fast growth and continuous rationalization. Britain has had virtually no growth in labour force due to migration (immigration has been cancelled out by emigration of British people to Australia, etc). Every phase of expansion has collapsed rapidly as wages rose due to labour shortages. The long-term effect has been stagnation. By the sixties, German wages overtook those of Britain, while economic growth and rationalization continued at an almost undiminished rate.

*Social effects:* The inferior position of immigrant workers with regard to employment and social conditions has led to a division of the working class into two strata. The split is maintained by various forms of discrimination and is reinforced by racialist and xenophobic ideologies, which the ruling class can disseminate widely through its hegemony over the means of socialization and communication. Large sections of the indigenous workers take the position of a labour aristocracy, which objectively participates in the exploitation of another group of workers.

*Political effects:* the decline of class consciousness weakens the working-class movement. In addition, the denial of political rights to immigrants excludes a large section of the working class from political activity, and hence weakens the class as a whole. The most exploited section of the working class is rendered voiceless and powerless. Special forms of repression are designed to keep it that way.

### Working-class Movement and Immigrant Labour

Immigrant labour has an important function for contemporary West European capitalism. This does not mean, however, that socialists should oppose labour migration as such. To do so would be incorrect

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<sup>51</sup> Many bourgeois economists and some *soi-disant* Marxists think that immigration hinders growth because cheap labour reduces the incentive for rationalization. Bourgeois economists may be excused for not knowing (or not admitting) that cheap labour must be the source for the capital which makes rationalization possible. Marxists ought to know it. A good study on the economic impact of immigration is: C. P. Kindleberger, *Europe's Postwar Growth—the Role of Labour Supply*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1967.

for two reasons. Firstly, it would contradict the principle of proletarian internationalism, which rejects the maintenance of privileges for one section of the working class at the expense of another. Secondly, opposition to immigration would cause immigrants in West Europe to regard the working-class movement as its enemy, and would therefore deepen the split in the working class—which is exactly what the capitalists are hoping for. The aim of a socialist policy on immigration must be to overcome the split in the working class by bringing immigrant workers into the labour movement and fighting against the exploitation to which they are subjected. Only by demanding full economic, social and political equality for immigrants can we prevent the employers from using them as a weapon against working-class interests.

The policies of the trade unions with regard to immigration have varied widely. The Swiss unions oppose immigration, and have since the mid-fifties campaigned for a reduction in the number of foreign workers. At the same time, they claim to represent all workers, and call upon foreigners to join—not surprisingly, with little success. The British unions opposed the recruitment of European Voluntary Workers after the war, and insisted upon collective agreements limiting their rights to promotion, laying down that they should be dismissed first in case of redundancy and so on.<sup>52</sup> The policy towards Commonwealth immigration has been totally different: the TUC has opposed immigration control, and rejected any form of discrimination. This rejection has, however, been purely verbal, and virtually nothing has been done to organize immigrants or to counter the special forms of exploitation to which they are subject. The CGT in France opposed immigration completely during the late forties and the fifties, condemning it as an instrument designed to attack French workers' conditions. More recently the CGT, as well as the two other big labour federations, the CFDT and the FO, have come to regard immigration as inevitable. All have special secretariats to deal with immigrant workers' problems and do everything possible to bring them into the unions. In Germany, the DGB has accepted immigration and has set up offices to advise and help immigrants. The member unions also have advisory services, and provide foreign language bulletins and special training for immigrant shop-stewards. In general, those unions which have recognized the special problems of immigration have not done so on the basis of a class analysis (here the CGT is to some extent an exception). Rather they have seen the problems on a humanitarian level, they have failed to explain the strategy of the employers to the workers, and the measures taken have been of a welfare type, designed to integrate immigrants socially, rather than to bring them into the class struggle.

Therefore, the unions have succeeded neither in countering racialism among indigenous workers, nor in bringing the immigrant workers into the labour movement on a large scale. The participation of immigrant workers in the unions is on the whole relatively low. This is partly attributable to their rural background and lack of industrial experience, but in addition immigrants often find that the unions do not

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<sup>52</sup> See Bob Hepple, *Race, Jobs and the Law in Britain*, London 1968, p. 50 and Appendix II.

adequately represent their interests. The unions are controlled by indigenous workers, or by functionaries originating from this group. In situations where immigrant and indigenous workers do not have the same immediate interests (this happens not infrequently due to the differing occupational positions of the two groups, for instance in the question of wage-differentials), the unions tend to take the side of the indigenous workers. Where immigrants have taken action against special forms of discrimination, they have often found themselves deserted by the unions.<sup>53</sup> In such circumstances it is not surprising if immigrants do not join the unions, which they regard as organizations for local labour only. This leads to a considerable weakening of the unions. In Switzerland many unions fear for their very existence, and see the only solution in the introduction of compulsory 'solidarity contributions', to be deducted from wages by the employers. In return the unions claim to be most effective instrument for disciplining the workers. When the employers gave way to a militant strike of Spanish workers in Geneva in 1970, the unions publicly attacked them for making concessions.

Where the unions do not adequately represent immigrant workers, it is sometimes suggested that the immigrants should form their own unions. In fact they have not done so anywhere in contemporary West Europe. This shows a correct class position on their part: the formation of immigrant unions would deepen and institutionalize the split in the working class, and would therefore serve the interests of the employers.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, all immigrant groups do have their own organizations, usually set up on the basis of nationality, and having social, cultural and political functions. These organizations do not compete with the trade unions, but rather encourage their members to join them. The aims of the political groups have so far been concerned mainly with their countries of origin. They have recruited and trained cadres to combat the reactionary regimes upon returning home. At present, as a result of greater length of stay and increasing problems in West Europe, many immigrant political groups are turning their attention to class struggle in the countries where they work.

It is the task of the revolutionary movement in West Europe to encourage this tendency, by making contact with immigrant groups, assisting them in co-ordinating with immigrants of other nationalities and with the working-class movement in general, giving help in political education and cadre-training, and carrying out joint actions. Such co-operation means surmounting many problems. Firstly, language and culture may make communications difficult. Secondly, the risk of repression to which immigrant militants are exposed may make them re-

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<sup>53</sup> For details of such cases see *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, op. cit., Chapter IV.

<sup>54</sup> We do not wish to imply that it is always incorrect for minority groups to form new unions, if the existing ones are corrupt and racist. It was obviously necessary for militant blacks in the USA to do this, as the existing union structure was actively assisting in their oppression. But organizations like the Detroit Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), though consisting initially of blacks only, were not separatist. They had the perspective of organizing class-conscious workers of all ethnic groups. Such organizations appear to be neither necessary nor possible in the present stage of struggle in West Europe.

luctant to make contacts. Thirdly, the experience of discrimination may cause immigrants to distrust all local people. This leads in many cases to cultural nationalism, particularly marked for historical reasons among black people. In order to overcome these difficulties, it is essential for indigenous political groups to study the problems of immigrants and the special forms of discrimination and exploitation to which they are exposed. Concrete attempts to combat these must be made. Indigenous groups must offer co-operation and assistance to immigrants in their struggle, rather than offering themselves as a leadership.

It is not only when revolutionary groups are actively trying to cooperate with immigrant workers' organizations that they come up against the problems of immigration. The majority of immigrants are not politically organized, whether through apathy or fear of repression. Groups agitating in factories or carrying out rent campaigns are likely to come up against large numbers of unorganized immigrants in the course of their daily work. It is then essential to take special steps to communicate with the immigrants and to bring them into the general movement. Failure to do so may result in the development of petty-bourgeois chauvinism within factory or housing groups, which would correspond precisely with the political aims of the capitalists with regard to labour migration. In Germany, the large numbers of revolutionary groups at present agitating in factories almost invariably find it necessary to learn about the background and problems of immigrant workers, to develop special contacts with them, and to issue leaflets in the appropriate languages. The same applies to housing groups, which frequently find that immigrants form the most under-privileged group in the urban areas where they are working.

Immigrant workers can become a class-conscious and militant section of the labour movement. This has been demonstrated repeatedly; immigrant workers have played a leading part in strike movements throughout West Europe. They are at present in the forefront of the movement which is occupying empty houses in German cities. Immigrant workers showed complete solidarity with the rest of the working class in May 1968 in France, they were militant in strikes and demonstrations and developed spontaneous forms of organization in the struggle.

But such successes should not make us forget the capitalist strategy behind labour migration. Powerful structural factors connected with the function of immigrants as an industrial reserve army, and with the tendency of part of the indigenous working class to take on the characteristics of a labour aristocracy, lead to a division between immigrant and indigenous workers. Solidarity between these two sections does not come automatically. It requires a correct understanding of the problems within the revolutionary movement and a strategy for countering ruling-class aims. It is necessary to assist the immigrant workers in fighting exploitation and in defending their special interests. At the same time revolutionary groups must combat racialist and xenophobic ideologies within the working class. These are the pre-conditions for developing class-consciousness and bringing the immigrant workers into the class struggle.