

Separate or equal

EVEN WHEN they are not being harassed by police in the streets or beaten to death in police stations, black people in Britain live under tremendous racist pressure — psychological, emotional and economic.

They live in a world which both openly and shamefacedly defines them as inferior, or ugly, or natural-born muggers, or work-shy ne'er-do-wells.

They live in a British state whose basic law defines black immigrants as an evil to be fought against, even to the extent of tying and gagging a young woman "illegal immigrant" so that she chokes to death in front of her child. They wrap it up in weasel words, but 'black' is what they mean and what the police and immigration officials who administer the law take it to mean.

All black people live with the knowledge that people like them were for centuries chained and enslaved and used as beasts of burden with no more rights than animals and sometimes treated worse than animals. It is no wonder that some black people react against this predominantly white, still heavily racist society, by wanting to have as little to do with it as possible.

They become one or other variant of "black nationalist." They spurn and reject this oppressive, maiming society. They proclaim that black people can be self-sufficient, that they can, if they network properly, lead an essentially isolated black life, even in a predominantly white society. Some black people adopt attitudes to whites which mechanically invert and mirror white racism. Others are seduced by Louis Farrakhan's Black Muslim religion with its all-embracing message of black exclusiveness and the goal of black self-sufficiency.

We repeat: none of this is surprising. Indeed the surprising thing is that there is not much more of it, that young black people do not go berserk against a society that forces them to carry an intolerable social, economic and psychological burden.

The truth, however, is that such reactions cannot serve the interests of black people. United States and British black people do live in a white society. For the foreseeable future they and their children, and their children after them will live in a predominantly

white society. It is simply not possible for black people to organise as separately as Louis Farrakhan and his disciples, and others, want them to. If it were possible, it would be one more variant of black-white 'apartheid', or its old America equivalent, "Jim Crow". That could not free black people from oppression. It would only formalise and institutionalise one variant of oppression and inequality.

There is no benign apartheid! The white racist slogan: separate but equal was always a naked self-serving lie. Separate did not mean equal: it meant subordination for black people.

If black people in Britain were to confine themselves to black nationalist ghettos now they would be separate but they would not be equal. They

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would inevitably be subordinate.

In plain truth, it is not possible for black people wounded by the racist society around them and economically oppressed by poverty, poor educational opportunities and mass unemployment, to find general social solutions "on their own."

They will never be equal until they are truly equal citizens in the actual multi-racial society in which they live. Therefore: no other possibility is open to black people who want equality and a decent life than to fight as part of the labour movement for the status of human beings amongst equal human beings, black and white — that is for justice and equality for all.

Most of the right-wing black programmes for creating a layer of black

capitalists — Louis Farrakhan's, for example — offer nothing to most black people. In the very long term the existence of a serious black component of the capitalist class might help raise the status of black people generally. Generations from now!

Even then, it would not necessarily affect the reality of life for millions of poor black people. Their lives are cramped and shaped by the lack of work to which capitalism condemns them. In work, they are exploited by capitalists, black and white. The whole capitalist system needs to be overturned. We need a socialist revolution. Black people alone can not achieve that.

The emotional response that leads some black people to spurn this society and try to kick it away from them with a curse cannot free them from its clutches, from either racism or capitalism, but only perpetuate their condition as an oppressed and exploited minority. Under a system of black separation within white capitalist society, most black people would probably be more oppressed, not less.

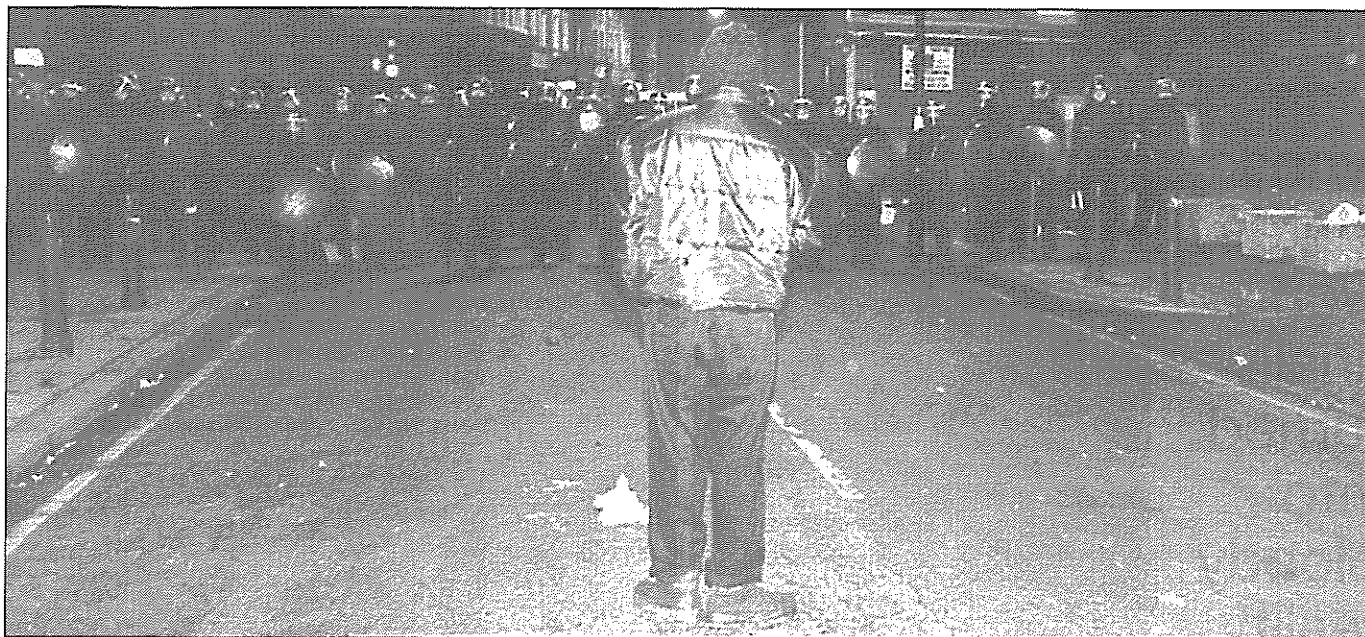
Black separatism is therefore a sham and a delusion.

Black people — far less than 1 in 20 of Britain's population — have no option but to fight for equality within this society. In the fight to get rid of the hateful features of this society, black people have no other major ally capable of radically changing society than the labour movement.

The labour movement itself is not free of racism, far from it. But it is in alliance with that movement, and as an organic part of it, fighting to purge it of racism, that black people — the overwhelming majority of whom in Britain are workers — have made the substantial, though massively inadequate, advances they have made since the late '40s, and early '50s, when large groups of West Indian workers started to settle in Britain.

Bernie Grant MP, who for long has been a respected figure on the left, has recently joined those who reject the ideas outlined above. He wants black people, including those born in Britain, to remove themselves from Britain altogether.

Battered by the racist society he has lived in for decades Bernie Grant flirts



Protester faces armed riot police in Brixton

with black separatism and — logically — advocates the politics long associated with the extreme right of British politics. He wants to “repatriate” black people. Integration has failed, he says.

The erstwhile left MP recently met our racist, reactionary disgrace of a Home Secretary, Michael Howard, to discuss funding a voluntary “repatria-

tion” scheme which would allow black people in Britain to “return home.” In October 1995, Grant shared a platform in north London with British representatives of Louis Farrakhan’s ultra right-wing and anti-semitic black nationalist “Nation of Islam”, at a meeting organised by the Nation of Islam.

In his expressed views, in his activ-

ities and in his associates — Michael Howard or Louis Farrakhan! — Bernie Grant is now a force for confusion and reaction in British working-class, especially working-class black, politics.

In the article which follows Mark Osborn examines Bernie Grant’s views and recalls some of his ideological forebears.

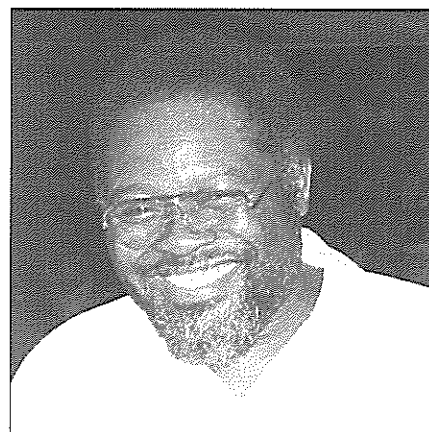
Segregate and repatriate?

By Mark Osborn

AT the 1993 Labour Party conference, speaking at a meeting to mark the 25th anniversary of Enoch Powell’s notorious “Rivers of Blood” speech — in which Powell predicted a race war unless black people

left Britain — Bernie Grant MP conceded: “There is something in what Powell said.” He added: “I suspect his words will come true unless some strong action is taken.”

Grant believes that the government should fund a repatriation scheme and send British black people “home.” The answer to racism, Grant in effect says, is what the Powellite Tories, the National Front and



Bernie Grant

British National Party fascists have been saying all along: black people, get out of Britain! — or, “take the money and run”, as the black weekly, *The Voice*, derisively put it.

Embarrassingly for Grant, the only prominent political figure to back him in 1993 was Winston Churchill, perhaps the most openly racist — and incontestably the most stupid — of all the Tory MPs. Embarrassing, yes, but an illustration of a political symbiosis with a long history — of far-right racism, and disorientated black anti-racism which winds up apeing its oppressor.

Just how demoralised Grant had become was shown clearly in December 1993. Speaking at a private meeting of his “African Reparations Movement,” Bernie Grant declared “I’m not talking to you about Indians, Bangladeshis or Pakistanis... I’m ▶