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Towards Racial Justice

Breaking up the Panthers

Following the Mangrove trial, Howe joined the Panthers. This was a natural move. He had worked closely with the movement's leadership during the trial, and his performance inside and outside the Old Bailey garnered a great deal of respect from the Panthers' rank and file. Moreover, at Howe's instigation, C. L. R. James had spoken to the Panthers and his words had led to a new direction. James congratulated the Panthers on their campaign in support of the Nine and advised them to go further by bringing out a new type of paper:

... "I'll tell you what to write in the Newspaper. Don't write all this Leninist rhetoric, you don't need it." And he pointed to people in the audience and said "What is it you do?", and he said "I'm a bus conductor." "Then write about bus conducting; write about what happens at your garage . . . write about what you want, and what you don't want".

(Dhondy 2010)

The resulting publication was the *Freedom News*, edited by the Panthers' Eddie Lecoite, Jones-Lecoite's husband.

The Panther's leadership was not wholly sure of their new recruit. Howe wrote for the *Freedom News*, and his relationship with Lecoite was far from easy. Lecoite derided Howe's education as 'bourgeois', and Howe resented Lecoite's editorial interference. Dhondy, a member of the Central Core, recalls that they recognized Howe's 'star quality' but were concerned that Howe lacked discipline. 'He was treated as an individualistic maverick, I suppose with some justification.' At the time, Dhondy's 'reading was that he was a very valuable rhetorician, a show-off, a dandy and not to be trusted as a political activist, he might go off in any direction he wanted. . . . A loose cannon but extremely valuable in his own

way, if he could be tamed and taught some lessons' (Ibid.). As a result, Howe was never elected to the Central Core. Howe recalls:

... I was too rebellious to be on the central committee. I had views of my own, so I conserved an independent faction inside of it, but never acquired the discipline that the Stalinist type central committee required. It was built on the same structures as the Bolshevik Party, it was a kind of vanguard party organisation.

(GPI CAM 16/30)

From what Howe remembers, the Panthers never exceeded 300 members, although the Youth League, which met at the Oval House, was much larger.

The Asians who came into it were young intellectuals. Like Farrukh Dhondy, H.O Nazareth ... and Mala Sen, a Bengali woman, and then there was another man, Suneet Chopra who talked a lot of Maoist garbage, he was in it too, and artist called Vivan Sundaram – there were about four or five Asians in the London organisation. But whereas you had rank-and-file West Indians in it, one did not have rank-and-file Asians in London. In the Midlands and in Bradford it was different. Several Asians, mostly students and young people joined the associated groups of the BPM ...

(Ibid.)

Howe was involved in the ideological education of the Youth League and on one occasion took part in some drama. Cast against type, he played the part of a judge. It was 'the first and I hope the last time that I ever got involved in acting!'. These 'cultural evenings' attracted between '800 or 900 young people with ease' (Ibid.). Linton Kwesi Johnson, who joined the Panther's Youth League in 1969 or 1970, recalls that Howe was 'particularly liked by the members of the Youth section because he was very articulate, a great talker and he had style and charisma. He had a little following amongst members of the Youth League' (Johnson 2011).

Dhondy, who quickly became a close friend, tried to take Howe under his wing and instil some discipline. The two were involved in one of the movement's triumphs. The 1972 Booker Prize went to 'art critic, novelist and Marxist' John Berger for his novel *G* (*Telegraph*, 24 November 1973). At the prize-giving ceremony, Berger, a reader of *Freedom News* and an acquaintance of the Lecontes, announced that he would share his winnings with the Panthers (*Guardian*, 25 November 1972). Berger's largesse presented a problem: the Panthers had no bank account. In fact, Dhondy was one of the only members of the Panthers' Central Core with a steady job and a bank account that could

receive Berger's £2,500 cheque. Needless to say, the Panthers were not welcome at the prize giving at the Cafe Royal, so Dhondy, Howe and Berger met in the Albany, a pub on Great Portland Street. Business done, Berger invited the two Panthers to a house in Primrose Hill where a party celebrating his Booker win was in full swing (Dhondy 2011).

The money was put to good use. The Panthers bought a house, a base of operations. With the mortgage arranged in the names of Dhondy and his wife Sen, the Panthers acquired 37 Tollington Park, Finsbury Park. Howe recalls that the house was used, among other things, as a print shop. 'If a pin dropped, within 24 hours we would come out with a leaflet' (GPI CAM 16/30). The Lecointes lived on the ground floor, with other activists above and below (Dhondy 2011).

The house was a mixed blessing. Events at 37 Tollington Park precipitated the break-up of the movement. The Jones-Lecointe leadership was becoming morally prescriptive. The disgrace of Tony Sinclair, a member of the Brixton branch of the Panthers, was the first sign of trouble. Sinclair was sleeping with two women in the movement, and this behaviour offended feminists in the Panthers. 'The feminist branch of the Movement got hold of him and said that he should be punished and exposed' (Dhondy 2011). Sinclair remembers Jones-Lecointe's uncompromising attitude: 'Althea wasn't backward in coming forward in . . . opening a discussion on what she felt was disrespectful behaviour on your part' (Wild 2005: 101).

Communal living in Tollington Park accentuated the control exercised by the leadership. It allowed the Lecointes to police the morality of Tollington Park's residents and, in so doing, set standards for the movement as a whole. The turning point came when the Central Core were assembled to pass judgement on a Panther who had slept with a white woman in the shared house. As far as the Lecointes were concerned, this was a gross breach of revolutionary discipline. Dhondy arrived at the meeting, not realizing what was happening. His first instinct was to defend the unfortunate Panther. He was after all 'a citizen of this country and has a perfect right to screw who he likes' (Dhondy 2011). As the meeting progressed, Dhondy decided to wash his hands of the whole thing. 'I thought, hang on, I'm not participating in this, this is not a Central Core meeting, this is a kangaroo court' (Ibid.). The Core found the Panther guilty and determined to punish him by revealing his misdeeds to the community. Outraged, Dhondy walked out of the meeting and the movement.

Walking away was not enough. In the face of the BPM's degeneration, Howe, Dhondy and Sen decided to break up the movement. They worked 'on the Jamesian principle that organisations become their opposites, which is Darcus' great slogan' (Dhondy 2011). Thinking back to Howe's decision to leave the Panthers, Dhondy opines: 'I'm sure Darcus was inspired at the time by the fact that James moved from one organisation to another, in America for instance . . . so Darcus was not averse to breaking up organisations' (Ibid.). Howe withdrew, refusing to speak at public events, and as a result, audiences and money dried up. Dhondy, who was the legal owner of the communal house, used the mortgage as leverage. The Core retaliated by sending three Panthers armed with machetes to Archbishop Temple's School in Lambeth, where Dhondy was Head of English. Their express purpose was to threaten to kill him, but they had not counted on the Lambeth Sixth Formers who, eager for a fight, offered to take them on. Dhondy and Howe discussed the matter and in the end, Dhondy signed over the house to the movement, but the die was cast and the movement dissipated (Ibid.).

Police and thieves

Having finished with the Mangrove trial, Howe found work with Release. Founded in the summer of 1967 by London-born artist and activist Caroline Coon and 'art school drop-out' Rufus Harris, Release was conceived as a 24-hour emergency service. In founding Release, Coon 'determined to ensure civil and legal rights for all the young people being scooped up by police using drug laws to harass, threaten and intimidate the emerging anti-establishment hippie movement' (Coon 2011). Needless to say, defending young people from police harassment was bound up with the fight against police racism. Early on, Coon helped defend her Jamaican friend Lloyd Ellis, who had been charged with possession of cannabis and possession of a firearm. The case brought Coon into contact with Michael X. Coon, a natural 'ally of the front against racism', tried to work with Michael X during his 1967 trial. However, collaboration was impossible as 'Michael proved elusive' (Ibid.). Nonetheless, Michael X's trial led to Coon's introduction to Raphael 'Dean' Sergeant. Coon recalls that 'Dean worked very closely with us, giving us all the technical legal advice we needed to set up Release. . . . By 1970, when the government clamp down consolidated, Release had an established group of lawyers and barristers (who had to be anti-the death penalty) who were ready to defend all those singled out and arrested on the front

line.' By the time Howe joined Release in early 1972, the organization, whose work had been praised by the Rowntree Foundation, had gained charitable status (Ibid.).

Howe worked together with Barbara Beese at Release. Broadly speaking, it was an office job. 'I'd finished the Mangrove,' recalls Howe, 'and I just wanted a job, that would be part of the rhythm of my life, so Release took me on' (Howe 2011e). On a day-to-day basis, Howe handled complaints against police harassment. He also wrote a pamphlet detailing the legal strategy of the 'Old Bailey Three', discussed below.

By now Howe understood the intimate connection between drug pushing and the Metropolitan police. The criminal scam was later exposed in the trial of six drug squad officers in 1973. Barry Cox, a print journalist in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before becoming involved in television and deputy chairman of Channel 4, chronicled the whole affair in *The Fall of Scotland Yard* (1977). Cox describes the system that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s thus:

In the old CID tradition, Pilcher's team of detectives acquired trusted criminal informants, whom they protected as well as they could. But when these informants were drug dealers, a system had to be created whereby certain dealers were in effect licensed by the Drug Squad to deal without much fear of prosecution, in return for providing a number of their customers as "bodies" for the police.

(Cox et al. 1977: 87)

What is more, drug seizures were 'recycled', partially returned to the streets by the drug squad and sold at 'police prices', giving police informants a competitive edge over other dealers (Ibid., 95-6).

Cox met Howe while working for the *Sunday Telegraph* and recalls being introduced to him through Ambalavaner Sivanandan at the Institute of Race Relations. While writing the book, Cox sought out Howe as a man who understood the police's system and the black underclass in Notting Hill, and who had a knowledge of various West Indian informers, including Bartlett, 'one of a small number of West Indian dealers' who was on good terms with the Drugs Squad. Cox remembers the meeting fondly. 'He was an entertaining fellow, so it was hard to believe he'd been badly treated, but I guess he had been' (Cox 2011). Cox recalls that in spite of his own experiences, Howe displayed a critical detachment and a degree of irony about the police during their conversations. Commenting on the structure of the gangs that were working with the police, Howe 'felt that the cell system of pushers created by Bartlett was as good as any revolutionary network' (Ibid., 96). In addition, Cox recalls

that Howe confirmed what he had already discovered, that the police were effectively complicit in and profiting from London's drug market. Howe had first learnt of the arrangement while at the Mangrove and opines that one of the reasons that the police targeted the restaurant was Crichtlow's unequivocal refusal to be part of the drug 'recycling' racket.

The Institute of Race Relations

Howe joined the Institute of Race Relations as editor of its monthly journal *Race Today* at the end of 1973. Established in 1958, the IRR was initially a wing of the Royal Institute for International Affairs. Its original focus was on race as a dimension of international and colonial politics. When Leila Hassan joined the IRR in 1970, as Secretary to WEL Fletcher, the company secretary, it was still part of Chatham House and retained its establishment feel (Hassan 2011).

While working at the IRR, Hassan joined the Black Unity and Freedom Party, a group that had emerged from the remnants of the UCPA in 1970. George Joseph, the first general secretary of the BUFP, argued that the organization was an explicitly Leninist group (Wild 2005: 94). The BUFP was also influenced by Maoism, which had enjoyed a renaissance in the 1960s due to Beijing's break with Moscow and the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution. Sivanandan, the IRR's librarian, was loosely associated with the group. As Hassan became involved with the BUFP, she became acquainted with Sivanandan, and she was soon transferred to work with him as Information Officer in the IRR's library.

Race Today, like the IRR itself, went through a process of evolution. In its first few years, Hassan recalls, the magazine was dry, academic and patronizing: '*Race Today* would look at the communities that EJB Rose and his team were looking into, and publish stories about them. But very much: here are these nice coloured strangers who've come, these are their habits, this is how they live, it was that sort of journal' (Ibid.). However, by the early 1970s, the magazine began to open its pages to activists. Sivanandan recalls that *Race Today* was at the forefront of efforts to radicalize the IRR.

Race Today was the first stage of our struggle to get black voices heard. Peter Watson was editor of the journal for a few months during which we (the editorial committee of RT was composed of IRR staff) tried to report and represent black

points of view. But this only became policy under the editorship of his successor Alexander Kirby.

(Sivanandan 2011)

What started in *Race Today* soon spread to the rest of the institution. The catalyst which precipitated Sivanandan's 'palace coup' occurred in 1971. IRR researcher Robin Jenkins wrote a piece that was critical of EJB Rose's, *Colour and Citizenship*. Consequently, the board decided to sack him. The staff, by contrast, sided with Jenkins. Controversy over Jenkins was not the only issue. There were also moves to close *Race Today*. Sivanandan recalls:

The immediate issue was that RT had run an advert for the Anti-Apartheid Movement on its back cover while at the same time having a picture of Lord Goodman (then negotiating with Rhodesia) on the front cover under the headline, "5 million Africans say 'no'". According to our Council this had cost them thousands of pounds in a fundraising campaign that they had going with big business.

(Ibid.)

The issue over the Anti-Apartheid Movement was symptomatic of broader tensions. Sivanandan explains: '*Race Today* had already been transformed by Sandy Kirby and his editorial committee and was now the cutting edge of the IRR. And there was the rub. The management council insisted that *Race Today* had lost its political neutrality and so endangered the charitable status of the IRR' (Ibid.).

Packing the membership was central to the 'coup'. Hassan recalls the process thus: 'anybody who visited, we would ask them to become a member of the Institute . . . so that when it came to the vote, the vote was that we didn't want the council' (Hassan 2011). The strategy was effective, and in April 1972, Sivanandan staged his internal revolution (Mills 2010: 211). The membership voted 94 to 8 against the Board and in favour of *Race Today*'s new direction. Hassan recalls marching into the Board Room chastising the 'capitalists' and their 'blood money', demanding that they leave (Hassan 2011). As a result, Sivanandan took over the direction of *Race*, which became *Race and Class* in 1974, whereas former members continued publishing *New Community* (Harney 1996: 216). In an attempt to be more relevant to the community, Sivanandan relocated the IRR from Jermyn Street to King's Cross.

Howe had first visited the IRR before the coup. He had used the IRR library in preparation for a 2-day National Conference held in mid-May 1971

at Alexandra Palace where he gave a talk entitled ‘The exploitation of Black Workers and the Industrial Relations Bill’ (GPI JLR 3/2/13). Wilfred Wood, who had become chairman of the IRR following the ‘coup’, encouraged Howe to apply for the position of *Race Today*’s editor. Sivanandan also backed Howe’s appointment for a variety of reasons:

The reason we had asked him to edit the journal was not specifically because of that [Mangrove] trial. I also knew other people involved in the trial like Althea Lecointe. The kinds of things that made me think Darcus could be a right kind of editor for *Race Today* was that he was well-informed, well-read on political issues and most importantly that he like us saw the concept of “Black” as inclusive of Asians (very important then), he also saw class as well as “race” as an important determinant and he was interested in struggles in the Third World, especially in former colonies. In other words he was not a black nationalist.

(Sivanandan 2011)

Howe agreed to apply on the condition that he got the job. The interview panel comprised Hassan and two others. Howe remembers nothing of the event except for the ‘genuine spark’ that he felt between himself and Hassan. In any event, Howe was successful and, in spite of competition from Ron Phillips, got the job (Howe 2011d).

Editing *Race Today*

Howe’s appointment was made public on 6 November 1973. The *Guardian* announced:

Race Today, former magazine of the Institute of Race Relations, has a new editor, a black activist who promises to steer the magazine yet further from its quasi-academic origins towards the front lines of racial politics.

Speaking to the *Guardian*, Howe set out a new direction thus:

We have for a long time been told to use the power of the white liberals. But we must now use our own power: we have to show how it can be used.

(Ibid.)

The new direction became clear through a series of early editorials. They stressed a series of themes: the centrality of self-organization, the Jamesian

nature of the paper, the different historical experiences of the black and white working classes and the possibility for greater radicalization presented by the relatively anti-labour policies of the Heath government.

Howe's first editorial, 'From Victim to Protagonist', signalled a radical break with the past. Rather than proceed on 'liberal' assumptions that black people were 'helpless victims', *Race Today* would reflect the 'self-activity' of the 'Caribbean and Asian peoples'. The editorial concluded with a recognizably Jamesian coda:

Our task is to record and recognise the struggles of the emerging forces as manifestations of the revolutionary potential of the black population. We recognise too the release of intellectual energy from within the black community, which always comes to the fore when the masses of the oppressed by their actions create a new social reality. *Race Today* opens its pages to the tendency which seeks to give theoretical clarification to independent grass roots self-activity with a view to its further development.

(Howe 1974a: 3)

This was radical, even for the new IRR, an implicit criticism of the stance of the Institute under Sivanandan. For Howe, the IRR had become too focused on black people as victims. He wanted to use *Race Today* to present black people as agents of change.

The February editorial addressed the Energy Crisis, the issue dominating contemporary politics. In the context of the miner's strike, Howe argued that anti-government feeling existed in black and Asian communities to a much greater extent than it did in the white working class. The roots of this disparity, he argued, were historical: the British working class had been socialized by capitalism for more than 400 years, whereas the mores of the new arrivals were at greater variance with prevailing values. Nonetheless, the editorial held out the possibility of black and white workers finding a common cause, something that had been impossible, on an ongoing basis, since the explosion of white working-class racism in 1958 (Howe 1974b: 35).

Howe's third editorial was on a similar theme. Discussing the relative positions of the white and black working class, 'Bringing it all back home' argued that there was 'an increasing tendency within the white working class to take on the British State' (Howe 1974c: 67). Howe attributed this to a historical change. Traditionally, British capitalism had exported its most repressive side to the colonies, while at home, the British working class had been bought off by social democracy. However, the policing of recent immigrants had brought

the horrors of the colonial system to the streets of Brixton, Handsworth and Notting Hill. Moreover, British capitalism refused to extend the niceties of social democracy to immigrant workers or working women. As a result, some in the white working class were beginning to see through the liberal assumptions about the essential fairness of British society. Consequently, there was a new possibility that black and white workers could draw strength from each other. What was needed, Howe concluded, was an acceleration of black 'self-organisation, indicating that we too are prepared to take on the British state' (Ibid.).

In some ways, Howe's line was a continuation of the radical position that he, Dhondy and Sen had held since the beginning of the decade. Dhondy summarizes his thinking thus:

We said, you're never going to cause any sort of revolution in this country. But black workers, people who had come here to work – and work on the lowest rung of the ladder – can affect the policies of the unions, policies outside the unions, and we could begin to demand that we have an integrated society which will change things. You can never bring about a socialist revolution unless the white working class moves.

(Dhondy 2011)

For Dhondy, the position of *Race Today* was a continuation of the best politics of the Panthers. At the same time, the Jamesian influence was accentuated:

What was *Race Today*? . . . Obviously it came out of the Black Panther Movement's good politics. And then there was the CLR Jamesian influence which told us clearly, write about things that are happening to *you*, not "theory" as in the Socialist Workers Party newspaper. And don't write about great national issues which you can't affect . . . a Leninist party should do that, but we weren't a Leninist Party. We were trying to gather a lot of people to demand the democratic rights of an immigrant population.

(Dhondy 2010)

The Jamesian influence was self-conscious. Howe was 'driven by the small organisation as opposed to the vanguard party' (Howe 2011d). Specifically, Howe was inspired by the analysis of the journal of the small organization that James had outlined in *Facing Reality*:

The journal contemplated here . . . exists so that workers and other ordinary people will tell each other and people like themselves what they are thinking, what they are doing, and what they want to do. In the course of so doing, the

intellectuals and advanced workers, both inside and outside the organisation, will have their opportunity to learn. There is no other way.

(James et al. 1974: 126)

This Jamesian approach was evident in Howe's fourth issue. The centrepiece of the April issue was a series of interviews with Asian workers. Evoking the spirit of Marx's *A Worker's Enquiry*, Howe's editorial argued that the interviews were significant because they revealed 'the day-to-day struggles of the Asians on their introduction . . . to factory life, their customs, their values, their ideas, hopes, aspirations and fears as well as their drive toward self organisation' (Howe 1974d: 95).

In the first year under Howe's editorship, *Race Today* covered a multitude of issues. The centrepiece of the first issue was Selma James' 'Sex, Race and Working Class Power' (James 1974). Howe's focus on black people as protagonists was evident in articles on the experience of Asian workers in the April issue, on the community campaign to free Lloyd James, Robin Sterling and Horace Parkinson, the 'Brockwell Park Three'; and in Sen's article concerning the Imperial Typewriters' strike.

Back to Brixton

Relations between the new editorial team and the Institute soon became tense. Technically, *Race Today* had been detached from the IRR in March 1973, when it was 'hived off' and made part of the new charity Towards Racial Justice (*Guardian*, 15 March 1973). As Sivanandan saw it, this was a technical change, which allowed the IRR to continue its work as an educational charity, separate from *Race Today*, which had an overtly political purpose. In spite of this, the first issue bedevilling the relationship between the IRR and *Race Today* was that of control. Howe argues that Sivanandan wanted to retain control of the journal's direction. Hassan concurs: 'Siva basically believed that the institution was his. And he told me, he told us all, "Whatever Darcus says or does, you need to come down stairs and report it to me"' (Hassan 2011). Howe refused to stand for this kind of interference: 'I had just come out of the Old Bailey, for 55 days, fighting for my freedom . . . that was in my head – so I wasn't going to go and be manipulated' (Howe 2011d).

There were also ideological differences. Hassan recalls that Sivanandan 'believed that black people were victims' (Hassan 2011). Howe's first editorial

was a broadside against this position, and needless to say, 'Siva didn't agree with a word of it' (Howe 2011d). For Sivanandan, 'it had to be about white racism,' Hassan explains, 'racism that had formed us and deformed us, that was our fight. Whereas Darcus said "No, we're forming our own organisation"' (Hassan 2011). Hassan's contention is supported by a *Guardian* interview, from January 1974, in which Sivanandan stated plainly that *Race Today* 'articulates the voices of the victims' (*Guardian*, 20 January 1974). There was also the question of location. The IRR was based in King's Cross, apart from the centres of London's black community. Howe's instinct was to be based in the community.

Finally under Howe's editorship, *Race Today* quickly started to make a name for itself. Dhondy recalls that as Howe took over, several old hands abandoned *Race Today*. As a result, Howe invited him to write a piece on the black experience in the British education system, a continuation of the material that Dhondy had written for the *Freedom News*. The resulting essay 'The Black Explosion in British Schools' became the lead article in Howe's second issue (Dhondy 1974). Dhondy started with Marx's reproduction thesis, arguing that the modern education system was there to skill and grade the workforce of the future. However, young black people refused to participate – they had no intention of being consigned to the lowest strata of the work force and therefore opted out. The article itself was an explosion. It was picked up by the mainstream press and television. The *Guardian's* education correspondent featured Dhondy's argument in 'Crisis Amongst Young Blacks' (*Guardian*, 16 January 1974). From what Dhondy recalls, Sivanandan was not pleased: 'I don't think Sivanandan liked it at all. Too much attention, too much Farrukh appearing on television. So he started making trouble for Darcus' (Dhondy 2011).

Against this background, a break with the IRR was inevitable. Howe stayed at the IRR's offices until August, when he relocated the *Race Today* office to Brixton. Dhondy recalls: 'One night, literally one night . . . at 11 o'clock when there was nobody there in the *Race Today* offices, we went in and took out all the equipment, the Photostat machine . . . furniture, machinery, the library . . .' (Ibid.). The contents of the office were bundled unceremoniously into Dhondy's dark green post office van and driven to his squat on Railton Road. 'The next day Sivanandan and his staff turned up to find the place cleaned out!' (Ibid.). This was *Race Today's* home for a few days until Howe, with the help of Olive Morris, found another squat on Shakespeare Road (Howe 2011d).

Sivanandan tells the story quite differently. For him, the relocation was a practical and a tactical decision.

First, there was the question of money. IRR and *Race Today* shared offices in Pentonville Road and money was tight and it became harder and harder to pay the rent and rates . . . *Race Today* realised that they could not pay the rent on their first floor offices and went to squat in Brixton. Second, there was the question of function: a charity could not do the same job as a political body. Nor could the management that served one function serve the other. Besides *Race Today* and IRR saw our priorities differently – and we tacitly eased *Race Today*'s way out of the Institute's governance.

(Sivanandan 2011)

However, the parting of the ways seems to have exacerbated the IRR's financial difficulties rather than remedying them. Some of the IRR's donors decided to back *Race Today*, and as a result, the IRR lost out. In 1974, the World Council of Churches agreed a \$10,000 grant to *Race Today*. The WCC increased their support to \$15,000 in October 1975 (*Times*, 1 October 1975).¹ Cadburys were also a major donor. 'For them it was much more authentic than what Siva was doing. Siva was very hurt by that, because the money that he should have got, they decided to give to us' (Hassan 2010).

Becoming a Collective

The *Race Today* office was alive with political debate. Hassan comments: 'Our lives, everyday, were spent in political discussion. People would come, and we would talk. The politics of the hour were thoroughly analysed, dissected and discussed and it was through the discussion that the Collective was formed.' The Collective was formed through a process of self-education. Howe invited Selma James to speak to the people around *Race Today*, then Dhondy did the same. The upshot of these discussions was the formation of the Race Today Collective. The organization was built on Jamesian lines.

I was a Jamesian. We weren't trying to mobilise people to follow us – never! That wasn't part of the deal. We would support the insurrection, but we weren't its leaders.

We weren't making any revolution, that's not our business. We had to educate the social group of immigrants that we came from and be sharp in fighting for their rights. But we weren't there to lead anybody. We were there to educate them and to be educated by them.

(Howe 2011d)

Nor was there an attempt to build a mass membership. *Facing Reality* ruled this out as a course of action for the new kind of small organization:

For thirty years the small organization knew what it meant by success: success was growing membership and influence. . . . But the organization of today will go the way of its forerunners if it does not understand that its future does not depend on the constant recruiting and training and disciplining of professional or semi-professional revolutionaries in the Leninist manner.

Its task is to recognize and record. It can do this only by plunging into the great mass of the people and meeting the new society that is there.

(James et al. 1974: 128–31)

Howe argues that one of the virtues of the Collective was its capacity to include members with a variety of political views. The Collective was an eclectic mix. It included Dhondy and Sen, intellectuals and former members of the Panthers; Hassan and Jean Ambrose, who were part of the BUFP; Patricia Dick, a one-time member of the IRR; Beese, one of the Mangrove Nine and a former employee of Release; and Johnson, who initially wanted nothing to do with the magazine, but after discussions with Howe became *Race Today's* resident poet. For Johnson, the politics of the organization was crucial to his decision to join.

It was not just the politics of race, it was also the politics of class. The analysis from which we were working was that we were part of a working class struggle. So from an ideological point of view, the fact that it was a class orientated organisation, as opposed to one simply dealing with race meant that I was more likely to join than not.

(Johnson 2011)

Visitors to the Race Today squat included Baldwin Sjollema, a leading figure in the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism, who, through ecumenical work, supported initiatives designed to undermine apartheid. Sjollema moved into the squat for a time with Anthony Wilson, a Quaker associated with the WCC and Cadburys. Sjollema and Wilson were both keen that their organizations should support the new Collective, so Howe invited them to move into the squat and see for themselves what the Collective was doing. Pauline Webb and Colin Morris from the Methodist Church also came to find out about the Collective and were keen to be involved and arrange financial support for the fledgling organization. Politically and financially independent,

the foundation was laid. The Collective was ready to throw its organizational weight behind the fight for racial justice.

Note

- 1 The decision was extremely controversial. The British Council of Churches initially believed that some of *Race Today's* material was 'inflammatory' and went as far as to reduce its donation to the WCC by £1,000 in/protest of the WCC's decision (*Times*, 6 October 1975).