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Olivier Esteves

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## **An international press review of the Powell moment (1968-1973)**

**Olivier Esteves, University of Lille**

The figure of Powell remains quintessentially English. A household name in British politics, Powell is but little known on the continent, which in itself probably underlines the need to internationalise research on him. There have already been some welcome signs of this through contributions by American colleagues (Whipple 2009) or through attempts at comparing Powell with other populist figures, the most obvious example being George Wallace (Porion & Kazin 2017). This book, then, partakes of an inchoate, international conversation among scholars working in history, political science, sociology and British studies.

One way of deparochializing Powell is to investigate foreign press responses to his speech and to his populist repertoire, something which, although a modest archival effort in itself, we believe to be quite illuminating. In order to do so, the years 1968-1974 from *La Stampa* and *Corriere De La Serra* (Italy), *Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel* (West Germany), *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* (United States), *Le Monde* (France), *The Irish Times* and *The Irish Independent* (Republic of Ireland), *De Telegraaf* and *De Volkskrant* (The Netherlands), *Le Soir* (Belgium), *Journal de Genève* and *Gazette de Lausanne* (Switzerland) have been looked into. For various logistical reasons the details of which need not detain us here, certain national presses could not be included in this study (notably from Northern Europe and the former Dominions of the British Empire). Similarly, national presses of countries which were not democracies in 1968 were also left out (Spain, Portugal, Greece).

Quantitatively, it was the Irish press that covered Enoch Powell's upsurge most extensively, the *Irish Times* digital archives producing 156 hits for "Enoch Powell" in the year 1968 alone, just as many as most British dailies. The American press also developed a keen interest in the populist's rise, particularly *The New York Times*, which sent some reporters to investigate the West Midlands grassroots. It is noteworthy that both the Irish and U.S. dailies

quoted, on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1968, very large chunks from the Birmingham speech. More broadly speaking, the Irish and American presses prove of particular interest, if only because of the number of Irish immigrants in Britain -those ‘internal Others’ (Myers 2015, p. 21) who were very little targeted by the Powellite backlash- and because of the spectre of American-style “hot summers” exploited by Powell in the wake of American riots after Martin Luther King’s assassination (04. 04. 1968), a mere two weeks before his Birmingham speech.

If one leaves aside what U. S. journalist Studs Terkel labeled the “American obsession” (i. e. race) whether race be connected with immigration or not, the fact is that France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands and others were not in the late 1960s grappling with issues of immigration, integration, welfare chauvinism, far-right populism, etc. Therefore, it was often with a degree of bafflement that their national press reported on events from Wolverhampton, Birmingham and the London docks accommodating Powellite demonstrations. In this way too, of course, the 1968 Powell movement was a harbinger of issues that would cross the channel in years and decades to come.

## **I/ Comparing Powell**

**Powell and Wallace :** the international mediatisation of the civil rights movement in the U.S. and of its White Backlash responses meant that a substantial number of readers of quality papers in Europe (and of course in the U.S.) had already heard of Alabama governor and zealous promoter of racial segregation George Wallace before they heard of Powell. The year 1968 would also culminate with Wallace’s presidential campaign as an independent, and the Southern populist would garner an impressive 13,5% of the vote. In many articles then, some superficial parallels were drawn between Powell and Wallace, often in the form of sound-bites that helped make sense of Powell’s politics and electoral tactics. Referring to the Powell-driven rift within the conservative party, *The Washington Post* noticed that “Britain’s ‘Wallace’ has his own party edgy” (04. 11. 1968). The same paper a few months before quoted a Tory M.P., Nicholas Scott, who quipped that “Enoch Powell is assuming the mantle of George Wallace of Alabama” (22. 04. 1968). Couching the terms of the British debate on integration in a language which was understandable by American public opinion, the “Race

Relations Bill” was often introduced as a “Civil Rights Bill” in Martin Luther King’s country (*The Washington Post*, 24. 04. 1968 ; 26. 04. 1968). As its arch opponent, Powell was logically presented as a Wallace-like figure : *The New York Times* (06. 06. 1970) dismissed him as a “George C. Wallace with an Oxford accent”, comparing him to “an old-style Southern-American race-baiter” (28. 04. 1968). *The Wall Street Journal* stated Powell may be considered as a “George Wallace with a bowler hat” (26. 04. 1968). Leaving aside these idiosyncrasies, the same paper more seriously referred to “the white backlash familiar to American politics” rearing its ugly head this time around in Britain (*Ibid.*), at a time when, for the record, the phrase “White Backlash” had only recently become a mainstream one in American media (Fortner 2015, p. 241-2).

In another piece just before the U.S. presidential elections, *The Wall Street Journal* lampooned the “cherished myth of the worker”, i. e. the mythical notion that the workingman is “the chief force for liberty, racial equality and social progress” (01. 11. 1968), a view soon to be exposed as erroneous by the numbers of American people that would cast their votes for Wallace. Borrowing from analyses of the working class by Richard Hoggart and George Orwell, the article also elaborated on the British racial debate and the Powell threat, seen as allowing some parallels with Wallace’s : “it is apparent that British workers fear the competition of Negroes, the same motives frequently attributed to American workers attracted by Mr. Wallace”. In much the same way, a piece from French-language Belgian paper *Le Soir* included an interview of a Caribbean academic in New York fearful for his career and future, a few weeks before American presidential “elections of fear”. The man contemplated leaving the country, but “in order to go where ?” (*pour aller où ?*), asked the paper (30. 10. 1968) :

This man is not unaware that racism is no American preserve. He does know that in England, which many Blacks his generation will still call ‘the Mother country’, comparable circumstances lead to strikingly similar reactions towards the coloured section of the population. He also knows that conservative M.P. Enoch Powell has the same role as George Wallace, who like him, and despite their respective trade-union traditions, is supported by very upwardly mobile white folks.

Tellingly, the Belgian paper delineated the first signs of a cross-Atlantic populist upsurge, with leaders such as Powell and Wallace exploiting feelings of being “strangers in

their own lands” among voters who feel elbowed aside by minorities (racial minorities and immigrants reified into a vague “they”) demanding equal treatment before the law. To cut a long story short, having been privileged for so long, any movement towards equality was experienced as unfairness (to whites). The electoral backlash illustrating these feelings of displacement was, in return, experienced as an unfair menace to men like this Black academic in New York, whose individual contribution to American academic life and collective contribution to British history as a member of the West-Indian group were obliterated in both Wallace and Powell’s political calculations.

**The elitist populist :** in many key respects the other comparisons found in international press articles undergird the ideological, style and rhetorical intricacies of Enoch Powell. Again, these parallels are often meant for the readership of these papers to come to terms with a hitherto unknown figure who burst very violently on the British and to a much lesser extent the international political stage. The Dutch *Volkskrant* presented him as a “Prophet of the White British”, a man with a “metallic voice”, a “razor-sharp face”, himself a bizarre mix of “Poujade, Wallace and Goldwater” (23. 11. 1968) (on Poujade, see Souillac, 2007).

Powell’s complexity is also highlighted by the way certain parallels may appear tempting at first glance, but are ultimately invalidated on closer scrutiny. Another common practise is for papers to cautiously state that “some compare him to...” rather than “he may be compared to”. The *Washington Post* states that the Wolverhampton M.P. “is compared to Hitler and Joe McCarthy, but even his critics credit him with intellectual integrity, brilliance, and an almost puritanical social and political life” (09. 01. 1969). Similarly, *The New York Times* balks at any serious association between Enoch Powell and Joseph McCarthy (28. 04. 1968) : the latter was merely a “cynical thug” who could not become a serious demagogue, whereas the former is depicted as a “a brilliant scholar who believes totally in himself and in his mission –which could make him more or less dangerous” (*The New York Times*, 15. 06. 1970). Be that as it may, the conservative party’s severe crisis sparked by Powell was “a crisis of the dimensions that faced the Republican Party in the days of Senator Joseph MacCarthy” (*The New York Times*, 13. 06. 1970). This parallel was all the more appropriate as in the 1970

general elections, Powell denounced the presence of “enemies” and “traitors” within the “civil service”, tapping into McCarthy-style conspiracy theories.

A long, detailed article in *Le Monde* (04. 05. 1968), which even quotes some Nietzsche-inspired teenage poems by the English populist leader, refers to “his mix of daring and demagoguery on the race issue, which has deserved him some parallels with Cromwell, De Gaulle,<sup>1</sup> Goldwater, Wallace, Poujade, Mosley. It would seem that he is probably an admirer of De Gaulle’s. No doubt, his intellectual brilliance places him way above the loud-talking rabble-rousers” who have very short-lived, rocket-like political careers in their countries. *Le Monde* also ventured to suggest that “he is starting to embody a reactionary Robespierre”. Lastly, both *Le Monde* (07.07.1970) and the Swiss *Gazette de Lausanne* (18.07.1970) likened Powell to the Swiss conservative member of Parliament James Schwarzenbach, who successfully campaigned to limit the number of foreign workers, despite the unanimity against him among the major institutions, parties, trade-unions, churches, etc.

Unsurprisingly, Oswald Mosley’s name crops up as well. In terms of style and rhetoric, *The Washington Post* argued that it made no sense to compare Powell to Mosley, because “Powell is far too fastidious to be a convincing rabble-rouser” (28. 04. 1968). But in ideological terms, some parallels were drawn between the Wolverhampton M.P. and the fascist leader. The British left-wing columnist Claud Cockburn, having moved to County Waterford in 1947, wrote a regular column in *The Irish Times*. In one of these (01. 05. 1968), he offered a vitriolic depiction of his only meeting with Powell in his very posh Belgravia House when he was minister of Health (1960-1963). Cockburn was scathing about Powell’s personality, the man being according to him the most ridiculously conceited man he had ever met, before venturing the following comparison ; “One cannot help recalling that Hitler’s philosophy and appearance were once regarded as richly comical and far too absurd to be dangerous”. Then Cockburn moved on to references to Mosley. He claimed that after Powell’s Birmingham speech, the happiest man in Europe must be Mosley himself, who lived comfortably close to the Windsor house in Paris. A parallel of sorts was therefore suggested with Powell’s abode in the heart of Belgravia, the implicit idea being that two leaders who proclaimed to be close to the people were totally alienated from the masses. Cockburn also

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Observer* (28. 04. 1968), Ivan Bates also made a parallel between Powell and the French leader.

imagined that Mosley must have taken delight in “the latest flood of sewage released by Enoch Powell”.

As has already been suggested, other articles venture commonalities between Powell and De Gaulle in France and or Barry Goldwater in the United States. Regarding the latter, it is an obvious fact that with hindsight both were political precursors to the conservative revolution in their respective countries, be it in terms of their economic and social policies or in terms of their approaches to race relations issues. *The Washington Post* argued that both Goldwater and Powell had polarized opinions, with liberals (in the American sense) likely to adhere ever more strongly to policies that were anathema to Powell : “Like the Arizona right-winger [Goldwater], he [Powell] may strengthen the liberal consensus that he is challenging by forcing community leaders to take a more forthright stand on racial issues than ordinarily they might be inclined to do” (29. 04. 1968). Although indeed there was a powerful liberal mobilization against Powell (as the foundation of the Runnymede Trust analysed in Brett Bebbler’s chapter indicates), it can hardly be denied that the maverick conservative swung the British political pendulum to the right (Hillman 2008, p. 96-9), with some dire immediate and long-term effects for liberals of all hues.

Lastly, De Gaulle. All allusions to the French statesman are devoid of any reference to race and immigration, and it is strictly in terms of their respective approaches to foreign policy and national sovereignty, to France’s and the U.K.’s position *vis-à-vis* the United States, and to the post-colonial function of their nation in newly-decolonised countries that Powell-De Gaulle parallels were ever ventured. In itself this parallel served to illustrate Powell’s political ambiguity. *The Washington Post* again underlined the fact that Powell was critical of Britain’s role east of Suez and that his worldview in this particular respect could easily be likened to De Gaulle’s (28. 04. 1968). In some way, both men displayed what Bertrand Russell called in a *New York Times* 1957 article a form of “aristocratic and cultural contempt” (Russell 2005 [1957], p. 176) towards the United States, which according to the philosopher was very deeply rooted among Tories. It is no coincidence if both the French and British leaders publicly expressed strong criticism of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Powell himself published an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* (01. 03. 1971) unambiguously called “America’s Moral Egocentrism”. Introduced by the paper as “a

conservative member of Parliament”, who is “regarded as a spokesman of Britain’s extreme right”, Powell nevertheless draws from the “At War With Asia” article by Noam Chomsky, although he remains critical of parts in it which he labels a “Marxist brew”. Above all, he lambasts (like De Gaulle, once freed from the burden of Algeria after the Evian accords of 1962) the futility of the war in Vietnam which is self-evident to all sharp observers outside the United States : “The military futility of the operations, so glaringly obvious and even predictable to the other side of the world, was apparently invisible to the Americans”.

## II/ Hard to pigeonhole

Many papers highlight the ambivalence in, rather than the paradox between, Powell’s stances in the field of race relations and immigration and his views on foreign policy issues and what are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century called “societal questions”. The Dutch *Volkscrant* (23. 11. 1968), like others, stresses the fact that despite his political pedigree he never expressed any enthusiasm for Ian Smith’s Rhodesian regime. Similarly, the reactionary leader was against the death penalty and had no problem with homosexuality.

In times when the Keynesian consensus would remain strong at least for a few years, Powell’s neo-liberalism was also noticed by many papers. The Brussels-based *Le Soir* kept referring to Powell as the “enfant terrible” of the Tory party, whose politics was “absolutely contrary to his own party’s”, particularly in the economic field, where he promoted the “wholesale denationalisation of state-owned industries” (08. 10. 1968). In 1974, *The Wall Street Journal* hailed Powell as “this British maverick politician who probably has the best economic head of British politics” (30. 09. 1974), which is completely in line with the American Establishment paper’s leanings. In 1965, two and a half years before his Birmingham speech, the same had published a long portrait of the Wolverhampton M.P. It was reminded that this champion of *laissez-faire* economics also happened to have been at the head of the N.H.S. Truly, the man was “at home with paradox” (16. 11. 1965). Powell was also hailed as having “a knack for the cutting phrase that earns delighted assent even from those fellow Tories who privately think his policies are vote losers”.



Much as in Britain, one of the key issues with Powell was whether he should be labelled as a “racist” politician, or whether his infamous 20<sup>th</sup> April 1968 should be written down as “racist”. *The Wall Street Journal* bluntly raised the question : “Does ‘conservative’ imply ‘racist’?” in the wake of his Birmingham detonation, before answering in the negative. According to them, the truth was rather that, sadly, the Tory M.P’s inflammatory rhetoric might well tarnish his party as a whole, despite his being promptly sacked from the shadow cabinet : “By guilt through association, millions of thoroughly tolerant conservatives get a vague bigotry brand they don’t in the least deserve” (26. 04. 1968). *The Irish Times* exposed Powell’s political “irresponsibility” in presenting the issue of coloured immigration “in such lurid terms” (23. 04. 1968). A few days earlier it singled out Powell’s playing of the race card for political purposes : “Powell has planted a fiery cross in the field of race relations” ; his “lurid imaginings of a Black Britain are a serious political power-play” (*The Irish Times*, 22. 04. 1968).

*The Washington Post* asked that a distinction be made between Powell, his speech, and the effects of his speech. In order to do so it quoted the British *Spectator*, to which Powell himself had contributed repeatedly, but which took their distances from the conservative M.P: “Mr Powell is no fascist (not even quasi-), but his speech has been welcomed by those who are. He is a Christian, yet the emotion his speech has sanctified is that of hate” (29. 04. 1968). The paradox exposed by *The Spectator* and quoted in the *Washington Post* is in sync with televised debates opposing Powell to Trevor Huddleston, Bishop of Stepney and anti-apartheid militant (Schofield, 259). It is also exposed in some of the (fairly small) number of letters against Powell based in the Stafford archives.

The German press was also alive to some of Powell’s political idiosyncrasies and was, overall, less prone to label him “racist” than, say, the Swiss or Italian presses. A piece in *Die Zeit* was entitled : “Hands Off Enoch !” (“Hände Weg Von Enoch!”, 26. 04. 1968), which attempted to make sense of Powell’s political ambivalence, characterized by “a mix of well-rounded conceptions, a blend of national pride, unfettered capitalism and humanitarian ideals”. If anything, it was claimed, Powell outclassed the great bulk of his colleagues in the conservative party. The article stumbled against the difficulty in pigeonholing Powell’s politics, again, typically by refusing to compare him : “He would never be a Goldwater, he is

not dumb enough. He wouldn't be a Mosley in a black shirt, he opposed the death penalty. He wants to repatriate the coloured folks to avoid inhumanity on both sides". In another somewhat positive article, this time from *Der Spiegel* (08. 01. 1973), Powell's long sojourn in Germany (1927-34) was described and the country itself was deemed as his "intellectual home" ("*Geistige Heimat*"), owing to the influence wrought upon him by Nietzsche, Schiller, Hegel, Goethe.

The Italian press investigated is often way more critical than the West German one. Whilst acknowledging that Powell in 1972 was the unrivalled mouthpiece of his party, *Il Corriere de la serra* straightforwardly referred to the "racist tenaciousness" (13. 06. 1969) of his politics. As for *La Stampa*, it labelled the Birmingham speech "unambiguously racist" (23. 04. 1968). For the Italian paper, Powell had shattered the bipartisan consensus "whereby racial arguments cannot be mobilized or put forward for electoral ends" (21. 04. 1968). Many of the papers indeed, like their counterparts in Britain, underline the way Powell committed a grave breach of political decorum by so abruptly expressing his views, which nevertheless found an echo among many British citizens, "who yet are often very liberal and open-minded on all other social, political and religious questions" (*Le Soir*, 23. 04. 1968). It is for this reason that Powell could hardly be shrugged off as an "insignificant rebel in politics" (*Ibid.*). The Dutch *Volkskrant* also referred to "a riot among conservatives over Powell" (*Rel om Powell*) within the House of Commons. The Amsterdam-based paper stated that "it is the first time in British history that the coloured question is becoming a real political issue" (23. 04. 1968). It would seem, then, that in many respects, Powell's ambivalence itself is a reflection of the ambivalence of the British towards what *The Times* called "The Dark Million", in a series of articles dated 1965. The international press generally stressed that Powell's 1968 speech was a disturbing litmus test for the British approaches to race, a test which might well have some repercussions on their international repute.

### **III/ Holding a mirror to England's racial problem**

Some papers were quick to expose both the fact that prior to Powell's speech the issue of multiracial tolerance had but been an untested, abstract notion in England and that the

speech itself revealed in a most violent way the vacuity of British celebrations of national fair-play and colour-blindness (Hartman & Husband 1974, p. 172). Those two types of arguments were often developed in the Irish and American presses, which was not unconnected to both Ireland's and the United States' troubled history with Britain. *The Wall Street Journal* noticed that "intellectually, Britain lives with a strongly moral concept of racial justice formed when race was an abstract issue. But practically, much of Britain lives in fear that its neighbourhood will someday turn other than white" (26. 04. 1968). In much the same way, their colleagues from the *Washington Post*, in an article entitled 'Facing Up', stated that "in its palmier imperial days Britain had no Commonwealth immigration bars and was proud of it. It also had not many immigrants" (23. 04. 1968). *The Irish Times* likewise underscored the post-colonial dimension of the issue now facing the country : "Britain is now being presented with the bill for her imperial past, of which the right-wing Tories are so proud that one might be forgiven for being surprised at their latter-day insistence on counting the cost" (26. 04. 1968). Regarding the turban controversy at the root of Powell's campaign, the *New York Times* reported, after the Wolverhampton borough had yielded to Sikh demands, first that most Sikhs actually go turbanless, implicitly meaning that Powellite exposure of the "canker" of "communalism" (in the Birmingham speech) was an exaggerated affair. Second, that "The British did not mind Sikhs wearing turbans to drive their tanks in the war. But their buses today that's different" (10. 04. 1969).

For others, this discrepancy between abstract principles and lived, perceived or fancied reality smacked of plain hypocrisy and ludicrous delusions of multiracial toleration. *The Irish Times*, for instance, quipped that "last week's explosion exposed the fatuousness of claims that Britons have no prejudice" (30. 04. 1968), which probably echoed the way, historically, Britishness constructed itself also (or primarily) on an anti-Catholic and anti-Irish basis. Somewhat suspiciously using the same words, *The New York Times* exposed the "fatuousness of claims that Britons have no prejudice" before adding that "the color prejudice that many Britons have long denied they shared with White Americans burst out with astonishing ferocity" (28. 04. 1968). Powell's focus on immigration in his campaigns, for obvious demographic reasons (coloured immigrants made up a mere 2% of the population) was also exposed as "dangerous, vicious nonsense" (06. 06. 1970). Ben D. Segal, a consultant on federal equal opportunity programs in the U.S., was quoted in *The Washington Post* as saying that "The British who used to smugly turn up their noses at the racial problems in the United

States, all of a sudden find themselves with a serious racial problem of their own” before concluding on the ominous note that “the disease of racism is more widespread than most believe” (20. 06. 1968).

More interestingly perhaps, in a particularly illuminating piece entitled “The Smell of the Beer Hall” (15. 06. 1970), a *New York Times* journalist present at a Birmingham rally during the 1970 general elections expressed his amazement that “it was possible to believe that even in Britain, tranquil Britain, hate could succeed as a political device”. As has been suggested by Camilla Schofield (Schofield 2013, p. 250) and Alice Ritscherle (Ritscherle 2005, p. 262), the real Powell stalwarts were more likely to be a silent majority of middle-class voters rather than ranting dockers or uncouth folks parading with banners replete with spelling mistakes for the bourgeois classes to laugh at : in Birmingham on that day “there were silver-haired ladies and skinheads and workers, but mostly middle-class, ordinary English men and women”. In a 30-minute speech these interrupted 25 times to applaud. The German *Die Zeit* also believed, rightly, that “the people who send him letters of support are petit-bourgeois folks who wouldn’t rent their vacant rooms to Pakistani immigrants” (26. 04. 1968). In a piece from *The Irish Times* entitled “I listen in despair” (06. 05. 1968), a reporter living in England carelessly started a conversation about Powell with his neighbours, and was taken aback by the potency of their anti-immigrant prejudices and unwavering support of the conservative M.P., however “decent” these neighbours may be in all respects besides race and immigration. In a scathing article which stated that “Mr Powell seems to be as proud of his sacks of fan-mail than as any Hollywood sex-goddess”, *The Irish Times* also reckoned that “most of the people who write to him are not converts to his cause ; they had converted themselves long since. They are timid sorts who have been made bold enough by his example to take shelter behind it” (26. 04. 1968).

Obviously, whether “timid sorts” or not, some of these mobilised in ways which went beyond the mere sending of supportive mail or the deprecatory gossiping against “them”. *Der Spiegel* stated that on the very week-end of the Birmingham speech, 700 Wolverhampton folks voted against the right of “coloured people” (*Farbige*) to join “working-men clubs” (29. 04. 1968), a choice which the soon-implemented *Race Relations Bill* would make illegal.

Some Belgian and Dutch papers likewise underlined the strategic and symbolical role played by immigration officers. *Le Soir* (26. 04. 1968) described at some length the collective letter of support to Powell sent by some 40 of them working at Heathrow, which was bound to have disastrous effects on public opinion. The Dutch *Telegraaf* went further in interviewing some of these officers, one of whom vilified Britain's too liberal policy on Commonwealth immigrants : "Everyone is lying. Pakistanis and Indians are dodgers. All my colleagues are tired of the chaos, bribery and deception connected with this whole immigration business" (26. 04. 1968). The irritation echoed the claim made, and reproduced in the British media, that some 39 immigration officers at the main London airport had allegedly forged about one thousands passports from the Indian sub-continent.

As is well-known, some local authorities had been heavily strained by the sudden influx of New Commonwealth migrants in 1960-1962. The Dutch *Telegraaf* (27. 04. 1968) reported the way in which the Ealing borough in West London had some 7 000 immigrant children out of a total of 41 000, overwhelmingly concentrated in Southall. Its schooling and social services being unable to cope satisfactorily still in 1968, the borough officially stated it could not accept more immigrants unless they be dispersed elsewhere, for instance in nearby Hounslow. This, according to the Dutch paper, was an unprecedented move from a local authority. Another *Telegraaf* piece interviewed a Wolverhampton local councilor according to whom ethnic clustering in Powell's city would inevitably produce some urban ghettos unless one started dispersing families (17. 05. 1968). In a country -The Netherlands- where housing dispersal for immigrants from Surinam and Indonesia was an object of debate (Robinson *et al* 2003, p. 25-7), the British lukewarm attitude to introducing such schemes was in itself interesting for a Dutch readership. Ultimately in England, 'spreading the burden' of the immigrant presence, which was largely apprehended through the lens of strains on Welfare services, took the form of schooling dispersal in some areas of large-scale New Commonwealth influx (Esteves, 2018), symbolized by a Southall in whose chamber of commerce Powell was to give a speech on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1971.

Like some of the Irish and American press, the Italian papers analysed here often point to the way Powell was actively challenging the English's self-image as a nation of tolerance. In so doing, *La Stampa* for instance empathized with the left ("For the English who truly

believe in the equality and moral foundations of their democratic system, today has been a bitter day”, 24. 04. 1968), especially upon witnessing the London dockers’ Powellite outburst, which was construed as “the absurd spectacle of workers assuming the most reactionary viewpoints” (27. 04. 1968). In France, *Le Monde* also repeatedly referred to “the very odd spectacle of a few hundred dockers demonstrating in Westminster” (25. 04. 1968). Lastly, it is worth quoting the way *Il Corriere* exposed the apparent thanklessness of the British : although the immigrants mostly had very menial jobs that nobody wanted to have, “Indians and Blacks [were] largely despised, which is somewhat paradoxical” (13. 06. 1969). Italy still being a country of massive emigration decades before coffin boats arrived at Lampedusa, the Italian press expressed a degree of bafflement at events around the Powell phenomenon in England. The Swiss *Journal de Genève* (13. 12. 1968) labelled Powell a “racist” with whom the majority of Britons agreed, before pointing to how emotional an issue immigration was in Britain ; it was even argued in *Gazette de Lausanne* (07. 10. 1976) that the question was traumatic for British public opinion (*traumatise l’opinion nationale*). The *Journal de Genève* rightly pointed to the wide gap dividing “the intellectual sections of the population”, driven to welcome immigrants either out of post-colonial guilt or to wallow in the delusion that there still *was* an Empire, as opposed to the working-classes who see “Jamaicans and others as rivals on the job market”. Hence, for these “to nurture feelings of hospitality proves way more difficult” (13. 12. 1968). It also exposed Tory hypocrisy towards Powell : although it had sacked him from the shadow cabinet, the conservative party did retain some of his ideas on repatriation for its electoral platform (01. 06. 1970). In effect, Powell’s campaign did also foreshadow the 1971 Immigration Act, a further clamp down on New Commonwealth influxes largely inspired by Powellite perceptions. It’s worth keeping in mind that the rules set up in 1971 were the ones that led to the ‘Windrush migrants’ crisis of 2018, highlighting the way Powell’s legacy is still wielding influence on British politics today.

Powell’s campaign was bound to have deleterious effects on Britain’s reputation abroad, particularly in Commonwealth countries. The *Wall Street Journal* posited that “too abrupt a departure from the liberal policies of the past could destroy Britain’s remaining political influence with the dark-skinned peoples of the Commonwealth, an influence that it has tried hard to retain, even to the extent of largely alienating the whites of Rhodesia and South Africa” (09.06.1970). At the same time, the American paper also laid bare the hypocrisy of countries like India and some East-African states, which had deep-seated ethnic

problems of their own but lost no time in ranting against Britain's racist immigration policies (*Ibid.*).

One last point deserves to be made here, about Britons of Irish descent and Northern Ireland. It is a fact that the Powell campaign had virtually nothing to say against the Irish. It is therefore unsurprising that the Irish press never really regarded Powell as a political menace to those who, *de facto*, constituted the largest immigrant group in Britain in the late 1960s. Apart from British pockets of sectarian strife (Glasgow and its 'Old Firm' game, Liverpool to some extent), the Irish presence was only apprehended as a problem where there were individual cases of undeserving 'tinker Irish'. Powellite silence about the Irish also helps to make sense of the way in which the conservative's campaign was probably more a moral panic about race and colour than about immigration *per se*. *The Irish Times* emphasized exactly this point: "A high proportion of those coming into the country from outside (as we in Ireland are in a privileged position to know) are not coloured" (26. 04. 1968). This also reflects the total assimilation of countless families with Irish names across the country. That some of these lost no time in joining the Powell bandwagon was much to the chagrin of Gerry Fitt, Republican M.P for Belfast West: "I am appalled that anyone of Irish extraction in Great-Britain should ally themselves with the bigotry of Enoch Powell"; Irishmen ought to know "the evils of discrimination in the past, and which still occur in Tory Northern Ireland" (27. 04. 1968). In a similar vein, *The Irish Times* (04. 05. 1968) reported that, following a poll, an estimated 2/3 of the students from Queen's University in Belfast supported Powell's campaign, a tendency which was probably unique on British campuses at the time. It bears repeating that indeed campuses were one of the few places where Powell was clearly *personae non grata*.

#### **IV/ Immigrant communities : low-profile attitude, resilience, agency**

The papers investigated for this chapter lay more stress on ethnic minority and immigrant militancy than on low-profile attitudes to life in Britain. There are probably different reasons for this. First, the Sikh turban controversy on Wolverhampton public transports was itself an immediate cause to Powell's campaign (Feldman 2011, p. 281-3). The

German *Spiegel* insisted on the way Sikh militancy locally was considered as a problem (29. 04. 1968). Secondly, some papers were keen to publish (because they made for great quotes) fiery declarations by some Sikh or West-Indian militants. Thirdly, “race relations” themselves are more often apprehended through the lens of actual issues to be addressed (competition for jobs, urban disturbances, strains on welfare services, discrimination) rather than as unproblematic, quotidian experiences which are too often deemed un-newsworthy. This is probably at the root of the concept of “race relations” in Britain as well as in the U.S. (Cox 2009, p. 75-9).

That circumstantial and structural slant notwithstanding, *The Washington Post*, for instance, lay particular stress on how West-Indians, Pakistanis and Indians in Britain lacked any really effective voice. Most of these people were still immigrants and full of fear, insecure, overly concerned about not “making of fuss”. According to the American paper, “in this respect they resemble more the Mexican ‘Wetback’ than any of our racial or ethnic minority groups” (20. 06. 1968). There were Black Power militants in Britain, but these were insignificant and only served to polarize ethnic minority opinion, who by and large had very little time for them.

The Dutch *Telegraaf* published a long article on the grassroots situation in Wolverhampton a few weeks after Powell’s incendiary speech (17. 05. 1968). It underscored the city’s “efforts against the forming of ghettos”, and interviewed one Neil Prendergast, a Surinamese entrepreneur who owned a lemonade factory with a 70-person multiracial staff. The man was very proud that some 100 000 West Indians actually drank his lemonade, and admitted to being “far too busy to be concerned with this whole business” about Powell. Urged further, he argued : “personally I have never noticed any of all this”. To him white and black staff worked together “in a brotherly fashion”. One white worker talked about an “irrational fear of coloured immigrants” ; his “neighbours are Asian and West-Indian and they are very decent folks”. This portrait of local, coloured businessman Prendergast gave the lie to stereotypes about immigrants as either seeking work, stealing jobs, or living off welfare help. Although it could always be dismissed as “the exception that proves the rule” by Powell supporters, the article’s main asset was that it placed the focus on Wolverhampton’s day-to-



day lived realities across some “racial divide” which was being conjured into existence by certain political interests rather than a palpable reality experienced on the ground.

Much more “insecure” and “full of fear” than minorities already living in England were those wishing to emigrate there. The French *Le Monde* laid stress in two lengthy articles (11. 03. 1970 ; 22. 06. 1970) on the plight of hundreds of would-be immigrants from Kenya and Uganda, African Asians, who were pushed to and fro across Europe, stranded in many airports as a direct result of the deleterious effects of Powell’s campaign on immigration policies (Schofield, 200). For the record, the number of new Commonwealth immigrants plummeted by about 35% from 1968 to 1969. A *Le Monde* journalist interviewed 5 African Asians who got help from Université de Vincennes to the east of Paris, a brand new “People’s campus” created in the wake of the 1968 May Rebellion. The French paper focused on the case of 3 Ugandan Asians, who were refused entry at Heathrow, sent back to Uganda, then transferred forcefully to Nairobi, then Madagascar, then Mauritius. From thence they flew back to London, were then expelled to Paris, then Amsterdam, and lastly London, where they were finally accepted. It was estimated that there were 20 similar cases in Copenhagen, 22 in Belgrade, 4 in Sofia and 10 in Zagreb. The *Le Monde* articles illuminate the way Powell’s campaign was a hard-felt one not only among immigrants and ethnic minorities already in Britain, but also by these hundreds of people aiming at emigrating to the country.

Because these individuals and families were their relatives, minorities present in Britain were vocal in criticizing such a state of affairs. One of the main activities of the Indian Workers Association, as well as its Pakistani counterpart, was to deal with visa and passport issues from the Indian subcontinent. Some of its leaders tried to get organized beyond ethnic and religious boundaries. Mr. Joshi, secretary of the I.W.A (U.K) <sup>2</sup> stressed one week after Powell’s speech that a “Black People’s Alliance” was being formed owing to the emergency situation experienced in Britain (*The Irish Times*, 29. 04. 1968). Other papers reported vitriolic statements by immigrant leaders. *The Irish Examiner* quoted N. S. Mangat from Ealing, who claimed that “the Enoch virus is a mutation of the dead Hitler virus”, and like Hitler it would disappear : “Enoch Powell has ended his political career”, confidently stated M. Mangat (25. 11. 1968).

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<sup>2</sup> The I.W.A in Southall, the largest in the country, ran very much independently from the national headquarters.

Other immigrant leader statements drew from comparisons between ethnic clustering in Britain and in the U.S. The recurrent deploying of “America” as a foil whose racial violence and urban ghettos were menacing “England’s green and pleasant land” (Melchow 2011, p. 161-3) naturally elicited the curiosity of *The New York Times*. One article (29. 04. 1968) quoted the same secretary of the Indian Workers Association, Mr. Joshi, who dismissed the use of violence outright but made it clear that they might be forced into adopting violence, “We are not the people who create Detroit. Detroit is forced upon us”, thereby reversing the responsibility of potential racial violence upon the Powellites themselves rather than the immigrants and minorities. In another article, racial strife was, instead, apprehended as “a woeful legacy of empire” : “The British situation does not come close to that in the United States” (11. 04. 1969), be it in terms of racial hostility or in terms of ethnic minority militancy, which was if anything inchoate in Britain. Interviewed as he was relishing a curry in an Indian restaurant, the leader of the Black People’s Alliance which had organized the March for Dignity in January 1969 was also quoted as giving an ominous reminder of the post-colonial dimension of Powellism : “If Powell is right and rivers run with black people’s blood here, then rivers will certainly run with the blood of whites in the Caribbean, India, Africa and Pakistan –and we’ve got much, much bigger rivers” (*Ibid.*). Rhetorically pressured by Powell’s invectives and incensed by its concrete consequences in the form of racial violence, some immigrant leaders felt they were compelled to embrace U.S.-imported “self-defence is no offence” slogans. It is very doubtful whether the bulk of Sikhs, or of New Commonwealth immigrants at large, readily identified with these.

## **Conclusion**

Like some British dailies, some of the European and American papers discussed in this chapter endeavoured to dispel certain myths which Powellites swallowed whole. Two deserve a mention. The first is the sense of being flooded by immigrants, the second is about the purview of the Race Relations Act (1968). Regarding the former, and as happened so frequently in the U.S. “the myths and stereotyped fears [seemed] to dominate”. The fact was that the “dark million” represented a paltry 2% of the population, and yet “myth has it that the

country is being flooded”, lamented Mr Segal in *The Washington Post* (20. 06. 1968). The much-mediatised docker strike was a grotesque symptom of these fears. The same Mr Segal noted with dismay that angry dockers were about 28 000 in London, only 4 of whom were coloured workers. *The Irish Times* also duly noted that dockers and meat-porters did not have jobs which were menaced by immigrant competition (26. 04. 1968). Unsurprisingly then, these people’s behaviour “must have shocked those who believed in the legend of the traditional fair-mindedness of the British workingman” (*Ibid.*). Other articles (notably from the German and Dutch press) preferred to lay stress on how, in some constituencies, there was indeed a deep-seated feeling of being overwhelmed by immigrants, despite the paltry 2% (nationally) quoted above. Powell himself had tried to reap political benefits from this discrepancy, arguing as he did at the beginning of his Walsall speech (February 1968) that the plight of places like Walsall was of no concern to the vast majority of Britons, for whom New Commonwealth immigration was completely unconnected to their lives. Powell had referred to the “sense of hopelessness and helplessness which comes over persons or imprisoned, when all their efforts to attract attention and assistance bring no response”.

The second myth drew less interest from international journalists but is nevertheless noteworthy. It has to do with the mythical scope of the Race Relations Bill, which was implemented after a 14-hour debate in the Commons, less than three months after Powell’s speech. According to the *Washington Post*, Wilson’s bill to limit discrimination in the field of housing and employment was “the true test of national decency” (23. 04. 1968). Many thousands of angry constituents certainly believed otherwise, arguing in their massive epistolary support to Powell that the Bill itself would, if implemented, sanction “reverse discrimination” in England. Such imaginings had been given free rein by Powell’s use of the “whip hand” metaphor allegedly mobilized by another constituent which he quoted.

The Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* told a wholly different story in the wake of the Bill’s passing into law (11. 07. 1968). It insisted upon the impracticability of the newly implemented legislation : indeed, what judge, what court would decide that a job or a lodging refused had been refused *solely* on the basis of racial criteria at the exclusion of everything else (better suitability of other applicants, etc.) ? With hindsight, and with the number of *Race Relations Acts* replacing prior inefficient laws of the same name, it is extremely hard to argue

against the Belgian newspaper. Despite that, Powell had been central in providing reverse discrimination arguments against the “race-relations industry” and a White Backlash common-sense which generations of (white) Britons would rally around in the years and decades to come.

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