**7th January 1950 Front page. Headline: ’Stowaways should sent back home’** Feature article by Hull Daily Mail Special Reporter. (Top Right)

Stand-first: ‘Hull gets more than 50 coloured stowaways every year. They come into the reports as well, and already have established colonies at London, Liverpool and Cardiff, where many won’t work, but live on the various allowances this country makes to them. They have set a big problem, and social workers see as the only solution to it the rapid reshipment of them to their own countries. Shipowners too urge as the only real solution that stowaways should sent back home’.

As he secretes himself onto the ship in Lagos, Johnny, with ‘feline grace . . . glides through the darkness, the colour of his skin and the swiftness of his stealth defeating the keenest watch’. ‘Driven desperate by the poverty and squalor of his own country, Johnny is coming to this country illegally . . . drawn by a dream — a vision of Hull and Britain beyond the ocean, a land of security, wealth and boundless humanitarian hospitality’.

Over 100 had arrived over the past two years. ’In Hull, it is a continuing, fluctuating problem.’ The supply of clothing in jail (in Leeds or Northallerton) was ‘a big drain on society’s resources’. On release pocket money and a rail ticket are supplied and a ‘Colonial Office welfare officer’ directs them to the Employment Exchange. ‘Some get work; some do not; many don’t want it.’ ‘Hull has no colony yet due to skilful dispersal . . . But there is no guarantee that such a colony will not form in Hull.’

When discovered on the ships the stowaways ‘behave in exemplary fashion and work hard in the galley or wherever the captain directs’.

They are motivated by lack of work and low wages and ‘dazzled by the illusory prospects of a “paradise” in Britain. They know that, at worst, there is a steady and mainly inadequate income to be had from national assistance’.

Some find work, ‘but many are content to idle along indefinitely, in a condition of security, comparative luxury and sometimes crime, acquiring women and children through the years’.

Shipowners want those who arrive illegally and without means of support to be deported. But Hull lawyers argue that a change in law would be required, which might be unwise. ‘They argue that There might be grave repercussions if discrimination were made between these men and white citizens of the Commonwealth.’

Social workers on the other hand say the only realistic solution is ‘rapid reshipment back to their own country’.

‘The answer must lie with the Government and it is know [sic] that the Home Office have long realised the need for action.’

**Commentary:** It is in this article that we see a real hardening of attitudes — a precursor of the outright racism that was channelled in the 1960s by Enoch Powell. Note the comparison of the imagined stowaway ‘Johnny’ to an animal, the emphasis on his skin colour and its association with his ‘stealth’ — these are the familiar fantasies of racism. The stand-first (picked out in larger type above the headline) drums the ‘send them back’ beat, but the article is hard-pressed to find any substantial reason for the ‘big problem’ mentioned in the stand-first.

The ‘Britain as paradise’ myth is repeated here. No evidence is given for the writer’s allegation that ‘many’ do not want to work, and that idea is contradicted by the report that, when found on board and put to work, the stowaways show ‘exemplary’ behaviour and ‘work hard’. The myth is set here that the West Africans form ‘colonies’, implying that they choose not to integrate and, instead, segregate themselves. The racism is explicit when the article says that these West Africans ‘idle’ away their time in ‘comparative luxury’, turn to crime and ‘acquire’ (white) women. Since their National Assistance has already been described as ‘inadequate’ we can only assume that the writer is suggesting to the reader that their ‘luxury’ is a result of crime.

The ‘only solution’ is for the government to change the law to send the West African stowaways back as soon as they land. Although ship owners and social workers apparently believe this (none are quoted), lawyers rightly point out that this would be discriminatory if it did not apply to stowaways from white Commonwealth countries. Nevertheless, our ‘special reporter’ avers, the Home Office is well aware of the ‘big problem’ and, it is implied, will be taking action.

Dr Max Farrar