
Crisis in the British Union

by Dennis Porter

At the end of 1953, the membership of the British Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was 7,257. The average annual membership increase from 1889 onwards had been approximately 100 a year after allowing for transfers out, deaths and apostasies. By 1978 (the last year for which complete figures are available at the time of writing) the membership stood at 13,229, an increase over 1953 of almost 6,000, or an average annual growth of 240.

Given the Adventist predilection for measuring success by statistics, one may well wonder whether the title of this article is justified. Where is the evidence of “crisis”? For that we must cite some other figures. In 1953 the population of Great Britain was almost 100 percent indigenous. In 1976, according to government statistics, it was approximately 97 percent so and 3 percent immigrant, the 3 percent being divided almost exactly into three equal parts: West Indian, Indian and Pakistani and the rest of the “New Commonwealth.” In 1953 the membership

of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was almost 100 percent indigenous. In 1978 it was stated to be 54 percent indigenous and 46 percent immigrant, with these immigrants being mostly West Indians. Actually, the figure was much more likely to have been about 60 percent immigrant, if one considers attending members rather than simply names on the books. As early as 1972 a census of attendance on one Sabbath in the North British Conference gave a return of 1,528 nonindigenous adults and 368 children. A year later a similar census in the South England Conference showed 2,942 non-indigenous adults and 1,467 children, 2,352 indigenous adults and 841 children.

Put in the simplest terms, then, the problem in the British Union Conference is that a population overwhelmingly white has to be evangelized by a church with a membership almost two-thirds black. Even those figures do not show the whole extent of the problem. Adventist evangelism had traditionally been carried on in the larger cities to the almost total exclusion of the small-town and rural areas. It is precisely in those larger cities that most of the immigrants have settled — as early as 1966 over 4 percent of the population of London was immigrant — and have there-

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fore had the greatest impact upon the Adventist Church. At the end of 1953 there were 1,215 members in London, almost all indigenous to Britain. Twenty-four years later there were 3,674 members in London, of whom it is doubtful if many more than 200 were indigenous.

An unlikely combination of a hurricane and an act of the United States Congress was the precipitate cause of the current situation. Behind these lay the deeper, long-term cause of the economic situation in the British West Indies, particularly the largest island, Jamaica. That situation, precarious before the Second World War, grew steadily worse after 1945. The traditional remedy was migration, usually to the United States. In 1952, however, after a major hurricane had worsened economic conditions, the US Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Act, which had the effect of drastically reducing the quota of West Indians who could enter the US. But if Uncle Sam's door was shut, John Bull's was open. West Indians, like all other citizens of the Commonwealth, had the right of unlimited entry into Britain. From 1952 until the passage by Parliament of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 (which reduced but did not end immigration), between 250,000 and 300,000 West Indians, primarily Jamaicans, settled in Britain. In 1976 the government estimated that some 604,000 persons of West Indian origin or parentage were living there.

Many of these West Indians were Christians when they left their home islands. Their rejection of the forms of Christianity dominant in Britain is one of the most remarkable themes in the story of the migration and serves to throw into sharp relief the impact that that movement has had upon the Adventist Church in Britain.¹

West Indians came to a Britain that was not, in fact, a church-going country. Not only did they find their British workmates and neighbors given to the ridicule of religious practice; they often had to take employment where the working hours made religious observance difficult. Faced with such pressures, many ceased to practice their religion.

Those made of sterner stuff found yet other difficulties when they entered the portals of British churches. Many West Indians are outgoing, while many English people are reserved to a fault. It was not therefore difficult for the West Indian churchgoer to feel that he was not wanted in British churches. On the other hand, some clergymen, anxious to do their part in the cause of integration, singled out the newcomers in a way that embarrassed them. Sheila Patterson in her *Dark Strangers* (University of Indiana, 1964) quotes one immigrant as saying, "The minister ask everyone to welcome our black brother as if I some wild man from the jungle. I never go back there." Moreover, the church in England simply is different from the community in the West Indies with the same name. In the literature on the subject, this comes out repeatedly; the churches in Britain are "cold," the music is not inspiring, the sermons are not sufficiently spirit-filled, and so on. Later, the development of West Indian sects in Britain was to fill the vacuum and to provide a sense of community in an alien environment, but in the early days of the migration the response was simply to stay away. A sociologist, Robin H. Ward, found evidence of this in the sample he interviewed in Manchester in the late 1960s: "Whereas 116 of the 275 interviewed claimed to have been frequent church attenders at home (a minority even then), only 20 claimed this now; and while 27 said that their church attendance was infrequent at home, 110 gave this reply when speaking of the present."² An earlier investigator, the Congregationalist clergyman and sociologist Clifford Hill, who worked much among West Indians in the earlier days of the immigration, came to much the same conclusion. In his *West Indian Migrants and the London Churches* (Oxford, 1963), he says that whereas 69 percent of the West Indians then in London had regularly attended church in their home islands, only 4 percent (2,563) still did so at the time of his investigation, and only 3 percent (1,813) held actual church membership. Even these low percentages, Hill claims, are unrealistically high inasmuch as they are based on the 1961

census figure of 70,488 West Indians in London. Hill maintains that the 1961 figure was nearer 100,000 and that for 1962, 120,000. Hill's picture, however, is not complete, for he takes into consideration only the six major denominations in London. He has nothing to say about Seventh-day Adventism, and it is to this that we must now turn.

Extrapolating from Hill's London figures to arrive at an approximate figure for West Indian church attendance all over Britain in the early 1960s, one comes up with about 7,000, the West Indian population in Britain as a whole being then about 2½ times that in London. This figure of 7,000 excludes Adventists and so, to arrive at the total church-going population among the immigrants, one must add about 3,000 more who were attending Seventh-day Adventist churches. This latter figure is an approximation as no detailed statistics were kept, but a little later than Hill's date, 1,843 West Indians were attending churches in the South England Conference alone, so it is probably not far wide of the mark. Thus, one is led to the startling conclusion that in the early 1960s, some 30 percent of West Indian churchgoers

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in Britain were attending Adventist churches. Allowing for some distortion, it is probably safe to say that one in every four West Indians in Britain who wished to worship God in public meetings passed by the imposing edifices of the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and other churches and sought out the often humble meeting-places of the small Seventh-day Adventist movement. Not without justification, then, did Roswith Gerloff, a Lutheran pastor and authority on race relations and religion, call the

Adventist Church “the only functioning multiracial community in a well-established church body.”³

It is surely remarkable that Adventist immigrants remained faithful to their church in such large numbers. They, too, no doubt, came into the country at the bottom of the economic pyramid; the types of work they could get probably made Sabbath observance difficult. Part of the explanation for their loyalty in spite of difficulty may be that they were better equipped spiritually to withstand the prevailing atmosphere of irreligion in Britain. After all, they had been taught to regard themselves as part of a “remnant” in an apostate world and to expect persecution considerably more severe than the sneers of workmates at the factory bench when they produced a Bible to read in the tea-break or whistled a hymn as they worked. Moreover, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always stressed the importance of correct beliefs, in contrast to Christian bodies which emphasize certain ritual observances while allowing a wide latitude in doctrine. When the West Indian Adventists came to Britain, they found the same doctrines being taught and the same Sabbath school lessons being studied in Manchester (England) as in Manchester (Jamaica). John Rex and Robert Moore, in their *Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook* (Oxford, 1967), point out that in the south Birmingham area they investigated only the Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses among the existing religious groups that had large immigrant memberships (60 percent and 30 percent, respectively). On this they comment that both of these are movements in which “a sense of the rightness of their beliefs binds people together.”

Thus the Adventist immigrants did not come into a totally strange environment when they entered Adventist churches in Britain. They came, too, among an indigenous membership not entirely unacquainted with them, thanks to the weekly missions appeal and to appearances in British Adventist churches of furloughing missionaries with slides. The global and closely integrated na-

ture of the Adventist Church thus ensured a welcome for the earliest newcomers. They were given more than a welcome, however; they were given office. It had never been easy to persuade many English Adventists to accept church office, although, of course, as in all movements, there were some who were avid for it. To local churches which had difficulty in filling their quota of offices, the immigrants were a godsend. On the immigrants' part, church office was welcome because it helped to offset the feeling of rejection by the wider community, a rejection experienced by all, whatever their abilities, on the grounds of color. Non-Adventist writers of the 60s noted this. Malcom Calley, in *God's People* (Oxford, 1964), says, "Seventh-day Adventist congregations strive to make the stranger, whether white or colored, feel at home and the welcome they extend goes far beyond the conventional clerical handshake at the door." Sheila Patterson mentions "the warm welcome extended to newcomers not only by the pastor but by the members of the congregation." Both writers also refer to the practice of giving the immigrants work to do, both in proselytizing activities and in church office.

Although many immigrants intended one day to return to the West Indies, various factors, often economic, tended to convert a planned temporary residence into a permanent one. As a result, the church membership in Britain — in particular its racial makeup — has been vastly transformed, and it is to that transformation and its effects that we now turn.

Even according to official figures, there were in 1978 only 7,144 white members in the British Union, a slight decline from the figure of 25 years earlier. Had the historic net average growth of 100 a year during the years prior to the immigration been maintained, there would have been 9,700 members in addition to immigrants. At best, then, only a static white membership can be claimed for the labor of over a quarter of a century.

It has been argued that there has been a general decline in church membership in most denominations in Britain since 1945 and that Adventism has shared in this. If that is so, it is purely coincidental that the decline

in white membership has proceeded parallel to the immigration of West Indians. This may be true and it is given some substance by the relatively slow growth of the membership in the 1940s. However, another denomination, the Mormons — until recently a racially-discriminatory body that attracted few blacks, and also a movement whose American origin might suggest to the public a closer kinship to Adventism than to the declining denominations — has increased its membership in Britain phenomenally.

Such little relevant research as has been done also seems to point in the direction of some causal connection. Investigation shows that in two all-white areas of the South England Conference the growth rate between 1953 and 1978 continued at the former national average of around two percent, and this without any special evangelistic thrust there. During this same period the white membership in London (also part of the South England Conference) fell by over 80 percent. This may have nothing to do with the fact that in one case there was no black immigration while in London large numbers of immigrant Adventists settled during the period, but it does indicate that the decline in London cannot be attributed only to a general decline in religion in England.

Scholars have noted a connection between the increase in the number of black worshippers in British Adventist churches and the decline in their white counterparts. Rex and Moore, in the work already cited, say (page 188) that in the Birmingham church they studied, West Indians "have come to predominate in the organization and the English have become a minority group. . . . We suspect that the beliefs of this sect and its predominant membership are so alien to the ordinary Englishman that it will not attract any more English members." An immigrant author, Dilip Hiro in *Black British, White British* (revised edition, 1973), after detailing the large percentages of black members in several big-city Adventist churches, goes on to remark (p. 32) that "one of the reasons for this was the white members' propensity to leave as West Indians joined in numbers." He

also quotes the *Birmingham Post* of 4 October 1964, which said, "A study of churches by Robert Moore showed . . . the Seventh-day Adventist church loses white membership where blacks come in."

Such a relationship has indeed been observed by the journal of the most articulate black Adventists themselves. We shall recur to the London Laymen's Forum and its journal *Comment* in due course, but suffice it to say here that the former is an organization of black laity in London which has played an important part in the events yet to be narrated. In an article entitled "Which Way Now?" in *Comment*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 1977), G. S. Escoffery notes that "in the 1940s Holloway Church had over 300 members, 99 percent of whom were indigenous. Today there are over 500 members, 99 percent of whom are immigrants. This applies," he continues, "to dozens of other churches around Britain; this is known as the 'white flight.'"

All this leads one to ask why an integrated church was so hard to establish in the big cities. Little research has been done, however, though writers who have addressed the issue have pointed to differences of outlook, custom and mores to which the indigenous English have had difficulty adjusting.⁴

Whatever the reasons were for white withdrawal from city churches in the fifties and sixties, there were a few cases in which white members who had ceased attendance at their original churches when black membership there had become substantial were reclaimed for the movement when white companies were established in predominantly white areas not too far away. This was the case at Bromley, just outside London, to which members who had ceased to attend the Lewisham church, a few miles away within the metropolitan area, were eventually attracted.

It was not until 1962 that church officials began to hint that disproportionately large membership increases since 1953 were due in any part to immigration. At the Union session of that year, J. H. Bayliss, the South England Conference president, said, "While a large proportion of our membership net

increase has resulted from public and sundry other forms of evangelism, we cannot overlook the fact of immigrants from parts of the Commonwealth, particularly the West Indies, accounting for a fair section of the balance." Thereafter, the true situation began to be acknowledged publicly. At the end of 1965, according to Bayliss' successor, E. H. Foster, the membership of the South England Conference was 5,869, of whom 75 percent were white and 25 percent black. By 1968 the black membership in South England had edged ahead of the white, and two years later the percentages were given officially as 53 percent black and 47 percent white. In 1972 there were 3,988 black members in South England and 3,099 white, with approximately 3,000 black and 840 white children attending. For several years subsequently, accessions to the membership were to average two blacks to one white. And all the while white attendance — in contrast to the situation among blacks — was considerably lower than the figure for white membership. Exactly comparable figures for the North England (later North British) Conference are not available, but the trend seems to have been parallel although the numbers are lower.

In this new situation discontent gradually arose. Among blacks, this centered initially upon the English ministry. As Gerloff remarks, ". . . in Jamaica the pastor still serves as the real social worker."⁵ Most British ministers did not see themselves in such a role, having not been trained for it or called upon to exercise it before.

Before long, requests for black ministers began to be heard and they grew in volume as church after church in the cities became black until in some cases only the minister was white. The answer given to such requests was always that the British field could not afford to call black ministers with the accompanying expenses of furlough rights and so on. With hindsight it is easy to say that this was a mistake which was to have far-reaching consequences. It is possible that had black ministers been placed in certain churches in the fifties and early sixties, a polarization

would have taken place — each community going to where it found the style of worship and service to which it was accustomed — which would have resulted in a *de facto* regional system on American lines. That course was not taken and the penalties for not taking it became apparent as early as 1959 in an incident which was to become a sort of touchstone in racial relationships in the Adventist Church in Britain.

In 1953 an evangelistic center had been opened in the former New Gallery Cinema on Regent Street in the most fashionable part of London's West End. By 1959 large num-

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bers of immigrants were attending evangelistic services there, and the church which met there on Sabbaths was largely black. As blacks came in, white attendance declined, though it cannot be proved, of course, that the former movement caused the latter. The important fact, however, is that the church administrators of the time believed that it did and acted upon that belief.

In 1959 a circular was sent to black members asking them not to frequent the New Gallery on Sundays. At the same time plans were set in motion to find a new home for the church which met there on Sabbaths. That action has been looked upon as a gratuitous piece of blatant racial discrimination and, as such, has figured in various articles in *Comment* and in letters from the London Laymen's Forum to the General Conference. It would perhaps be nearer to the truth to say that it was a course of desperation which might never have been necessary had there been even a small corps of black ministers in London at the time who could have handled the problem. A problem there undoubtedly was. The reading-room, for example, fur-

nished rather luxuriously and equipped with Adventist literature to attract the general public, was being used on Sabbath afternoons as a place to eat sandwiches and attend to babies. There had also been complaints from the police about the blocking of the footway outside the building after services. Black pastors would probably have been able to impose a discipline which would have been accepted without rancor. The white administration could do so only at the cost of still-existing bitterness.

During the 1960s the steady increase in the black membership and stagnation in the white went on. Successive administrators tried to convince themselves that there was no problem and, given two traditional Adventist attitudes, this appeared to be true. One was the denominational obsession with numbers. The numbers kept on going up. The other was the traditional dominance of the clergy in the Adventist Church. The laity have never been allowed to play any really significant part in the government of the church, and as almost all the blacks in that period were lay people, they had no more influence upon administration than the white laity had. Indeed, what some of the more articulate immigrants saw as racial discrimination was simply the normal Adventist discrimination against the laity. Many of the demands they voiced, unavailingly, at conference sessions (for example, for church schools) had been voiced — equally unavailingly — for many years before by white lay members.

On November 23, 1973, a group of blacks in the London area founded the London Laymen's Forum, whose stated aim was “to encourage the progress of the church in Great Britain.” According to the forum, this would be achieved by the appointment of more colored ministers (“because cultural differences make it difficult for many ministers to understand our colored members”); by “proportional representation on the executive committees of conferences and union”; and by “more expenditure in immigrant areas.” Other goals were “a regional representative at the conference office”; “colored office staff”; and “immigrant-

orientated articles in church papers” (*Comment*, Vol. 1, No. 1).

In June 1974 the London Laymen’s Forum began to publish a duplicated paper entitled *Comment*. The third issue of this paper (September/October 1974) summarized a document recently sent to the General Conference. Beginning with the exclusion of West Indians from the New Gallery, it further made specific complaints of discrimination concerning the locating of evangelistic campaigns, the small number of black ministers in Britain, the lack of black representation on various committees, and the alleged encouragement by the administration of the “hiving off of white members into strictly white enclaves,” etc. It further charged that large numbers of black young people were leaving the church because they were denied church school education and black leadership.

The same issue of *Comment* (p. 2) urged that “our administrators must sit up soon and take notice of the stream of justifiable discontent in the mainly immigrant churches. They must not let it become a raging torrent which could tear apart the unity in our beloved church.” Ironically, at about the time these remarks were being published, E. H. Foster, now union president, was in Washington, D.C., with an extremely detailed memorandum on the situation in the British Union, what could be done to improve it, and an appeal for the money to do just that. The General Conference, with a fine sense of impartiality, turned a deaf ear to both pleas.

In May 1975 *Comment* devoted itself to the forthcoming conference sessions, urging “full and complete integration, unity and growth.” At the South England session, held at Plymouth, two London Laymen’s Forum leaders were put on the conference executive committee, and the plans committee produced a resolution entitled “Integration and Growth.” Most of what has happened in the British Union since then has flowed in some sense from this resolution.

The South England executive committee appointed a subcommittee to consider the resolution. According to *Comment* (Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 3), the subcommittee rejected both the resolution’s suggestion of black represen-

tation at departmental and administrative levels and the suggestion of a separate London conference which would, of course, have been almost completely black. Instead, the idea of a regional conference on American lines was then taken up and recommended to the full executive committee which passed the suggestion to the British Union. The Union, in turn, set up a study committee under the chairmanship of the secretary of the Northern Europe-West Africa Division. This committee recommended that a regional conference was feasible, suggesting an entity embracing nine churches in the South England Conference with a total membership of well under 2,000 (97 percent black and 3 percent white), while leaving in the remainder of the South England Conference nearly 6,000 members (42 percent black and 58 percent white).

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The study committee recommended that the entire British Union hold a referendum on the matter, though it, in fact, concerned only the South England Conference. The October 15, 1976, issue of the union paper, *Messenger*, carried an article by E. H. Foster explaining the referendum together with voting papers which had to be returned within one week.

Comment, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 1977) complained about “the rejection of the forum’s suggestion for an Integrated London Conference and the administration’s imposition of a referendum about a regional conference,” although in fact the forum had now come to support the idea of a regional conference itself. *Comment’s* objection to the referendum was that white members had been allowed to vote. Although the racial makeup

of the vote has never been revealed, it is believed that most of the white voters cast their ballots in favor of a regional conference. However, there must have been a very large black vote against a regional conference, for the figures published on December 10, 1976, showed 4,629 members opposed to such an innovation and only 849 in favor of it. As far as the British Union Conference administration was concerned, Adventists in Britain had rejected the idea of a regional conference, and that was the end of the matter. No other possibilities were to be explored. The status quo would be maintained.

The forum, however, had new ideas. The January 1977 issue of *Comment* gave a hint of its intentions. It said clearly that it could not “in all honesty accept a “no” vote as binding,” and another article in the same issue referred to a “powerful weapon” in the hands of the black members to achieve a regional conference.

In its next issue (Vol. 4, No. 2, March/April 1977), *Comment* allowed at least the hilt of the weapon to show by saying that the feasibility committee had been doubtful whether the remainder of the British Union could operate without the money which would henceforth be confined to a regional conference. In a memorandum to the General Conference, sent in May, the forum urged the establishment of a regional conference by September 1, 1978, “under the direction of the General Conference.” In its last issue of that year (Vol. 4, No. 4, September/October 1977), *Comment* reported that so far five churches with a combined membership of 1,118, including one with 295 members in the North British Conference, had voted in favor of a regional conference in soundings it had taken. In addition, it said, there were hundreds of other members in favor of such a reorganization. “The desire for regional conference overwhelmingly exists,” it concluded.

The campaign for a regional conference was furthered by other Laymen’s Forum publications. The most significant document was a well-produced pamphlet entitled *Towards Regional Conference*, in which the

“powerful weapon,” referred to earlier in *Comment*, was starkly revealed. “Have our brethren suddenly learned to love us as equals? Their refusal to share responsibility in the church with us suggests, not love of us, but love of something we have which is necessary for their well-being.”

As early as June 1976, one of the Laymen’s Forum leaders, Michael Kellawan, had been interviewed by *The Observer*, a national Sunday newspaper, and in the resultant article on June 27 appeared the words: “Most of the 23 churches in London, for example, are now predominantly black and there is resentment that their sacrificial tithe payments go into largely [sic] white hands . . . Mr. Kellawan is withholding his tithe and paying the money into a special bank account.” In 1977 three London churches withheld tithe completely and were estimated to have kept back some £18,000 (\$36,000). This was for only the latter part of the year and did not take into account tithe withheld by individuals in other churches.

The weapon (or perhaps the two weapons, for it may be that the implied threat of adverse publicity had an even more telling effect than the withholding of tithe) speedily proved effective. On March 8, 1978, the president of the General Conference with three senior General Conference officers and the officers of the Northern Europe-West Africa Division and the British Union Conference stood before a gathering in the New Gallery Center to unveil peace proposals to end the “tithe war.”

Although the meeting was to propound a policy for the whole union, almost all those present were from London (apart from the officers and committee members) and so most of the laity at least were black. Much of the day was spent in speech-making, from which it soon became apparent that there was considerable — although by no means unanimous — support for a regional conference on the part of the London laity. It was equally apparent that the General Conference representatives wished for no such thing. The reason for this, although publicly couched in spiritual terms, is perhaps not far to seek. The tide of agitation for black unions in the United States had for some time been

lapping ominously around the feet of the General Conference. The advocates of black unions were arguing that their establishment was a logical continuation of the policy begun in the 1940s with the creation of black conferences. The retort to this was that what had been appropriate in the 1940s was no longer so in the vastly changed climate of opinion of the 1970s. That argument would have been stultified by the creation of a black conference in Britain in 1978-79. Thus, not only did the General Conference misread the British situation by reading it in terms of that prevailing in America (from which, in fact, it differs enormously), but it was also willing to use the plight of the British Union as a pawn in a larger game of denominational power politics.

At about 4 p.m., the General Conference president arose to unveil what came to be known as the "Pierson Package." The "Package," as subsequently printed in the

"Some British Adventists now believe that in a short time a London-type situation will prevail over the whole union with only a few dying pockets of white membership remaining."

Messenger, began with a preface consisting largely of quotations from Mrs. White about the relationships between Americans and Europeans, used here to apply to those between blacks and whites. It then went on to set forth a series of proposals for "more meaningful racial representation" in the church, ranging from black typists in offices to black officers and departmental directors in the union and conferences. All committees and boards were to have greater black representation. Human relations workshops, a black youth center in London, better educational facilities for blacks and so on — all were to flow forth from a bountiful General Conference. The meeting was urged to accept this and to persuade the churches it represented to do likewise. Then at the ensuing

local conference sessions (1978) and the union session (1981) the proposals would be voted and implemented.

The earlier of those local sessions was little more than two months away, so there was not much time for opposition to crystallize. The London Laymen's Forum apparently decided to accept the "Package" and drop its campaign for a regional conference. Certainly by the time the South England and North British sessions convened (in that order) in May, there was no manifest black opposition to the proposals. Opposition, however, came from another quarter.

There neither was nor is a white organization comparable to the London Laymen's Forum. Indeed, the whole controversy so far had been between the white administration supported by the white ministers and the black laity supported by the few black ministers. It seemed to be forgotten that there was a third group to be considered, the white laity. Among some of those signs of dissent began to appear. Eventually white lay opposition in the South England Conference (there seems to have been none — at least articulate — in the North) came to concentrate upon two points: the election to union and conference offices of men with no experience of work in Britain and the increased representation of blacks on conference committees which (if not modified) could have eliminated white lay representation altogether.

In these circumstances a group of white lay members took a leaf from the forum's book and resorted to the duplicating machine. A circular was sent to a number of delegates outlining the background to the "Package" proposals, giving support to the demand for black ministers for black churches, but protesting against the two proposals mentioned.

The first debate on the proposals took place on the last day of the South England session at Bournemouth, May 18-21, 1978. On the Saturday evening before the debate, a group of white laity met the division officers. What happened at that meeting is a matter of some controversy, but the lay members present came away with the impression that a

promise had been made that no specific names would be brought forward by the South England Conference nominating committee for certain conference posts. Rather, a number of black ministers would be brought into the country and then be assigned to specific conference offices.

The Sunday morning debate was opened by the division president who promoted the "Package" in a lengthy speech with only a hint of the Saturday evening agreement. The chairman then announced that no speaker would be allowed more than two minutes. White lay delegates who had been at the Saturday night meeting supported the "Package" because they believed that the arrangement made then was the best they could secure. Others were divided and disconcerted by the suddenly announced gag-rule. Although a card ballot had been promised, as had separate votes on the various parts of the "Package," neither was implemented when it came to voting. As a result the proposals were carried easily although the objection about lay representation on the executive was met by a constitutional amendment increasing the committee's size.

The nominating committee then met. Under the terms of the "Package," it was assumed that the conference secretaryship would be reserved for a black. Those who had been present at the Saturday night meeting expected that this post would be left vacant until the arrival of the black ministers from overseas from whom a choice would be made. However, in direct contradiction to the agreement, the name of someone unknown to almost all members in Britain was forced through. The lay activities directorship was left vacant, but this made no real difference as the man eventually appointed received a direct call to the post. To emphasize the administration's rout of the white protestants, all the lay members who had signed the circular against certain aspects of the "Package" were *ipso facto* excluded from consideration for membership of the conference executive committee on division advice, while a member of the London Laymen's Forum was elected to it. Thus was inaugurated the new era of integration, racial harmony, brotherly love and mutual trust in

the South England Conference. Inasmuch as there was a black candidate for the secretaryship already working in the North British Conference, things went more smoothly at that session the following week.

In the nearly three years that have passed since the adoption of the "Package," there has been a curious shift of roles. The London Laymen's Forum appears to have accepted the prevailing situation, perhaps secure in the belief that weight of numbers will soon deliver the denomination in Britain over to black control. That some blacks so believe was evidenced in the winter of 1979-80 by an anonymous document sent to a number of overseas divisions and unions listing the white administrators in the British Union who would be free in 1981 to accept appointments elsewhere after their places had been filled by blacks at the conference and union sessions.

On the other hand, a group of white ministers in South England has voiced a demand for a regional system. This has resulted in a series of meetings culminating in a unionwide ministerial gathering at Coventry in September 1980. Here it was decided to set up a committee to look into the matter. Nothing further has been made public.

The conference sessions of 1981 are likely to prove crucial, for beyond the mere struggle for power, lie two irreconcilable concepts of the church. If it exists primarily for the spiritual succour of its membership, then the race that predominates in the membership should have the principal voice in its government and be given the opportunity to remake the organization in its own image with, it is to be hoped, some safeguards for the minority. If, however, the church's chief function is evangelistic, then primacy must be given to maintaining an organization which will appeal to the vast bulk of the population with, again, suitable provision for attracting the minority also.

The former case means black administrators spending the bulk of the funds available on projects appealing to blacks within the church (such as the very costly school recently established in London). The latter

implies a mainly white administration spending the bulk of the funds on evangelism aimed at the 97 percent white population (a suggestion for black and white budget advisory committees was rejected by the present union administration). In either case, however, whites or blacks, respectively, must be served by an organization catering for their particular tastes and needs.

It may be that the last opportunity to set up such a system was lost in 1978 when the "Pierson Package" prevented the establishment of a regional system. At that time a regional conference arrangement could not have been damned as "apartheid" since the most articulate blacks were demanding it. Some British Adventists now believe that in a short time a London-type situation will prevail over the whole union with only a few dying pockets of white membership remaining. When Adventism in Britain has thus become a black sect, the only remnants of a small, but spiritually thriving, white denomination will be back where their forebears started a century ago, meeting in

small groups in private homes, but owing no allegiance (or money) to an organization, whether at Watford or Washington, which has long since abandoned them.

Whether this ultra-pessimistic prophecy proves to be well-founded or not will depend very largely upon what — if anything — is done in the next two or three years. Adventism in Britain will not be helped by blacks accusing of racism anyone who wants to see an Adventist witness to whites survive in Britain. Neither will it be aided by whites hurling the charge of "black power" at blacks who honestly feel that their weight of numbers in the membership gives them the right to rule. The only hope for Britain would seem to be the overriding power of the Holy Spirit. Only through divine guidance can goodwill and a willingness to experiment (notably lacking thus far) make possible a *modus vivendi* whereby both communities co-exist peacefully in the same organized body. Meanwhile, in Britain, the body of Christ lies wounded, perhaps unto death.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The earlier part of this article is a precis of the treatment of the same subject in the author's *A Century of Adventism in the British Isles*, published in 1974 as a special edition of the union paper, *Messenger*. See pp. 40-44.

2. Robin H. Ward, "Some Aspects of Religious Life in an Immigrant Area in Manchester," *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 3 (1970), 18.

3. Roswith Gerloff, "Black Christian Communities in Birmingham: The Problem of Basic Rec-

ognition," *Religion in the Birmingham Area: Essays in the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Alan Bryman, n.d. (?1975), p. 70.

4. See Cynthia Handysides, "West Indian Integration in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Britain" (BEd thesis, University of Reading, 1968), pp. 20, 21; and Clifford S. Hill, "Some Aspects of Race and Religion in Britain," *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 3 (1970), 35-6.

5. Gerloff, p. 74.