

Respect NOT racism

National conference 6 November

City Hall, London



NAAR is supporting London Mayor Ken Livingstone's proposals to extend the 'Respect not Racism' initiative on a national basis. This follows the huge success of the Mayor's Respect festivals in the last three years. Over 100,000 people attended this year's Respect at the Dome, dedicated to the memory of Stephen Lawrence. Respect is the biggest anti-racist festival in Europe.

In the context of the current rise of racism and racist attacks in some areas, the conference on 6 November is an opportunity for public authorities, trade unions, voluntary organisations to work together to promote anti-racism, celebrate the contributions of diverse communities, oppose discrimination and share experiences of countering racism.

For further information contact NAAR on 020 7247 9907.

New citizenship tests pander to racism

Immigrants applying for a new British passport will have to pass citizenship and language tests before qualifying for a British passport. An interim report by the Crick group chaired by Bernard Crick said that applicants should display knowledge about living in Britain and British history. The Home Secretary David Blunkett has argued that these measures will help to eradicate racism, and improve integration in Britain.

The opposite is more likely to happen. These measures are placing the blame of racism in society onto the victims i.e. it is their lack of language skills and knowledge of British institutions and history that is responsible for the racism that black people experience. This approach not only strengthens the racists' view that it is up to black people to integrate, it also panders and supports that view.

Proficiency in English and knowledge of Britain and British history will not reduce racism in Britain. There are numerous cases of African-Caribbean boys - whose families speak English at home - performing less well at school than their white counterparts. This is due to institutional racism.

Over four years ago the Stephen Lawrence Report - a milestone in the fight to oppose racism in Britain - acknowledged the existence of pervasive institutional racism and brought this onto the national agenda. Since then there has been strong resistance to the Report's recommendations and attempts to undermine the any progress made as a result of the Report.

The citizenship tests are a concession to racism rather than a measure to eradicate it. The government should be working to fully implement the recommendations of the Lawrence Report. Stemming the tide of racism must become a priority for the government. This can be best achieved by an acknowledgement that Britain is a nation built on waves of immigration for thousands of years and its diversity should be celebrated and encouraged.

BNP gain Kirklees seat – They can and must be stopped

The BNP won yet another council seat in the Heckmondwike ward, Kirklees on 14 August. They received 27.8% of the total vote. With a turnout of 44% the BNP gained 1607 votes, while the Liberal Democrats gained 1483, an Independent 1147, Labour 982 and conservatives 470. The by-election was called after sitting Labour councillor Tim Crowther resigned from this seat. He stood again as an independent in the by-election. This is the first time the BNP have been elected in ward with a high Black population. There are now 3 BNP councillors in Yorkshire, with another two in Calderdale.

Alice Mahon MP for Halifax said of the BNP: "They have nothing to offer the people of Heckmondwike or Halifax - they feed off sowing policies of division and hatred." Mohammed Azam, Co-ordinator Of the Coalition Against Racism - Unite to Stop the BNP campaign said: "Wherever the BNP get elected, racist attacks increase. They have admitted that their ultimate aim is an all-white Britain. The lessons of Oldham are that the BNP can be defeated. In order to preserve the democratic fabric of our society, their fascism must be stopped in its tracks and driven back."

Where the majority casts its vote, and the electoral threat posed by the BNP is made explicit, the BNP can and will be defeated. The BNP were stopped in Oldham in two successive years and more recently in the Hapton with Park by-election in Burnley where a high turnout of 53.5% defeated the BNP.

The BNP is standing candidates in forthcoming by-elections - in Thurrock on 4 September, the Abbey Green ward in Stoke-on-Trent on 16 September and in Burnley on 16 October. In Burnley former BNP councillor Luke Smith resigned after a local newspaper revealed that he was a known football hooligan and banned by Burnley Football club. Later the BNP suspended him for an incident that occurred at the fascist Red, White and Blue festival.

It is vital that the BNP is defeated in these by-elections if you are able to help campaign against the BNP please contact the office on 020 7247 9907 or try the Coalition Against Racism – Unite to Stop the BNP office on 0161 624 1060.

Government policy fails asylum seekers in need

Recently released 'official' asylum statistics by the government show a fall of over 30% in applications. Asylum applications averaged 3,500 in April, May and June. However these so-called 'official' figures exclude many asylum seekers in desperate need, due to measures curbing asylum rights implemented by the government. These include the introduction of a 'white list' of countries – from which applications were presumed to be unfounded – had halved the number of applicants from those countries. In addition it is likely that Section 55 of the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act – which withdraws all form of state support from asylum seekers who do not submit their asylum application at port of entry – has significantly reduced 'in country' asylum applications. The figures do not clarify what impact section 55 has had on asylum applications. The Institute for Public Policy Research criticised the government's figures and argued that: "the reduction in the number of applications has been achieved principally by making it difficult for every-one, regardless of their circumstances, to get into the UK."

The UNHCR and Amnesty International recently criticised government plans to severely restrict legal aid for asylum seekers and migrants as part of proposals outlined in the controversial paper entitled *Proposed changes to publicly funded immigration and asylum work*. The aim of the proposals is to restrict the time that lawyers can spend in preparing and representing asylum cases. Proposals include five hours for an initial asylum application, four hours for appeals and only 3 hours for immigration applications. These limits are substantially lower than what is required.

Inquest into the death of Roger Sylvester From 8th September for three weeks

**HM Coroners Court, St Pancras, Camley St, London NW1
OWP**

It is almost five years since the death of Roger Sylvester in the hands of eight officers from Tottenham Police. His family have been denied up to now the opportunity to learn about the circumstances of his death. The inquest will be the first opportunity for some answers for Roger's family, who are calling on all their supporters to attend the inquest. For more information, contact RSJC on 07931 970 442 or email messages of support to the family at RSJC@hotmail.com

NAAR AGM

Saturday 6 December 10am – 5pm, TUC Congress House

The AGM is open to paid up individual members and affiliate organisations. The meeting will discuss NAAR's policies and priorities for the coming year.