

Unite against racism — stop the BNP

Following the local elections in England in May, when the racist British National Party (BNP) won three seats in Burnley, the BNP are attempting to use this gain as a base to push their politics of race hate nation-wide. This was made clear the day after the local elections when the BNP stated its aim of an 'all white Britain'.

The high vote for the BNP, especially their victory in

Burnley is an issue of national concern. The BNP is looking to follow the path of Le Pen's Front Nationale in France, which started off with just a few local seats and used this to build a national movement, receiving nearly 6 million votes in the French presidential election.

least one of their three votes for the BNP. In Oldham the average vote for the BNP in seats it contested was 27%. The BNP also received over 20% of the vote in seats in Sunderland, Wigan, Dudley, Sandwell Redbridge, and Bexley

Growth in support for extreme right politics represents a direct threat to the lesbian and gay community and should be opposed by all those who believe in an inclusive democratic society. The last time the BNP held elected office, for 6 months in Tower Hamlets in 1993, racist attacks increased by 300%. The BNP state that 'homosexuality is wrong and unhealthy for any community...the flood of homosexual propaganda to "normalise" this tendency has been both unforeseen and corrupting'. If elected the BNP would ban what they, in loaded terms, call 'the public display and promotion of homosexuality, including in schools and in the mass media'.

When the far right take power, they target many communities. The Nazi Holocaust affected Jewish, lesbian and gay and black communities as well as



At the local elections the BNP on average received 16% (1 in six votes) in the 67 council seats it contested. In seats contested by the BNP in Burnley, 33% of voters cast at

Unite against racism — stop the BNP



Speakers at a rally in Oldham calling for a vote against the BNP, addressed by Angela Mason from Stonewall and Julie Hesmondhaugh from Coronation Street

people with disabilities, trade unionists and those who opposed fascism. The violence whipped up as a result of their bigoted policies can be seen in the actions of nailbomber David Copeland, who attacked the lesbian and gay community in Soho, the African–Caribbean community in Brixton and the Asian community in Brick Lane. In the wake of the nailbombings, all these communities worked together to demonstrate unity against the bombings. It is essential that this unity is demonstrated now against fascism.

The BNP must be defeated in

Burnley and prevented from winning seats elsewhere. Next May, two of the seats held by the BNP in Burnley will be recontested. Broad based campaigning must begin now to ensure the BNP are defeated at the ballot box next year.

The Coalition Against Racism — Unite to Stop the BNP campaign is a tripartite partnership between the TUC, Oldham Asian organisations and the National Assembly Against Racism. The campaign sought to mobilise all mainstream opinion and political parties against the BNP, focusing on getting the 90

per cent of Oldham voters who did not vote BNP in the general election to turn out and vote. Its work, in the months leading up to the local elections, resulted in the extreme right fielding only 5 candidates, rather than the 11 they had been planning, and stopped the BNP winning seats in Oldham.

LAGCAR is calling on everyone to get involved in the campaign to stop the BNP — it is vital that in a climate where any community is targeted by their policies that all those who oppose the rise of fascism unite behind a common agenda of anti-racism and anti-fascism.

Volunteers needed

Respect Festival

The Mayor of London's free anti-racist music festival is on 20th July in Victoria Park, E3, headlined by De La Soul.



Get involved!
Respect needs volunteers.
Contact 020 79083 6554 or
info@respectfestival.org.uk

Attacks on asylum feed racism and intolerance

The government's new Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill received its third reading on 13 June, despite opposition to many of its proposals from MPs, refugee organisations and the National Assembly Against Racism.

Most opposition centred around the denial of mainstream education to children in the 'accommodation centres' where refugees would be assigned to. However, the government ensured that no vote took place on this issue, and the Bill was voted through parliament on 12 June by 362 to 74.

Lesbian and gay asylum seekers will be even more isolated, not just from people already resident here who have also fled from the same country, but will find it even more difficult to gain support from the lesbian and gay community. As lesbians and gay men, we should be arguing for a society that welcomes diversity and difference, and fighting for the rights of those claiming asylum due to

persecution and oppression in their country, to seek sanctuary here.

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill:

- confirms the scrapping of vouchers, but does not change the level of support which is 70 per cent of basic income support and is dependent on accepting places in accommodation centres.
- introduces a system of induction, accommodation and removal centres, which will separate asylum seekers from wider society. Asylum-seekers who choose to live elsewhere will be refused any other support.
- 'prohibits a child who is a resident of an accommodation centre from attending a maintained school or nursery'.
- introduces powers to remove children born in Britain
- will deport those whose asylum application is refused, and they will have to appeal from outside Britain.
- will raise the punishment for 'harbouring an illegal immigrant' from six months to 14 years imprisonment.

Amendment to Race Relations Act a welcome development

As from 31 May 2002, all public bodies are responsible for ensuring that their policies and services remove unlawful race discrimination and promote race equality. This welcome development arises from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and is an attempt to take on board the lessons of the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry.

The power of institutional discrimination may be well known to LAGCAR members, but it appears to be a new concept to some employers and service providers. These changes move us on from an understanding of equality as finding individual remedies for individual victims, to an understanding of the need to *promote and deliver* equality. As a starting point, all public

authorities were required to produce a race equality action plan by 31 May. These must cover both employment and the provision of goods, facilities and services. For bodies with more than 150 employees, monitoring is also compulsory.

Union and community groups have a vital role in ensuring public bodies pay more than lip service to this. Many are

also campaigning for this statutory duty to promote equality to apply across all discrimination grounds, as is already the case in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

● ILGA-Europe – the European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association – has recently produced a policy paper on pushing for this at European Union level – *After the Framework Directive: Combating discrimination outside employment*. The paper can be downloaded from their website at www.ilga-europe.org

Legacy of Pim Fortuyn was bigotry and hatred

The rise to political prominence and the death of Pim Fortuyn provoked debate in the lesbian and gay community over what he represented.

Pim Fortuyn's party, List Pim Fortuyn, stood in the Netherlands elections on a clear platform of curbing further immigration. Fortuyn formed part of the growth of the far right throughout Europe, represented in the rise of Le Pen's Front Nationale in France, Jorg Haider in Austria, and the election of 3 BNP candidates in the local elections in Burnley on 2 May. However, the fact that Pim Fortuyn was gay was posed as a contradiction: the *Pink Paper*, for example, described him on 17 May as 'on one hand a camp, queeny intellectual, a gay freethinker... on the other, he was a non-PC nationalist, who flew in the face of traditional Dutch tolerance by blaming an influx of Muslims for the erosion of Dutch liberalism'. The reality is that the rise in racism throughout Europe, is being reflected inside the gay community too.

The prime target for Pim Fortuyn, Le Pen, Jorg Haider and the BNP has been the Muslim communities. These populations face ignorance, negative stereotyping, discrimination, and rising numbers of racist attacks. Pim Fortuyn's particular targeting of immigration from Muslim countries had an extra spin to it — by whipping up fear amongst

lesbians and gay men that their rights would be under threat — difficult given the oppressed position Muslim and other black communities occupy right across Europe. The result was to contribute to an Islamophobic climate. The reality is that a tolerant and diverse society that welcomes refugees and immigrants benefits lesbians and gay men, and that lesbians and gay men also seek asylum.

Unfortunately, this is not understood by the *Pink Paper*, which claimed: 'the unpleasant reality is that, as more Muslims arrive, the Islamic right will gain more influence, causing problems for the LGBT community, especially gay Muslims. Alternatively, and even worse, immigration could force the further rise of the British hard right... many of Fortuyn's views were unacceptable but he did offer a

route — although not necessarily a good route — out of the immigration problem for gays.'

Blaming immigrants and asylum seekers for a rise in racism is not new. This argument was used to prevent Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany settling in Britain by claiming that further immigration would fuel anti-semitism. Blaming Muslims for Islamophobia and the rise of the far right is just as wrong as claiming that lesbians and gay men being open about their sexuality are responsible for fueling homophobia. Scapegoating vulnerable communities such as asylum seekers only fuels hatred and intolerance against us all.

Bigotry and racism have no place in the campaign for a better society for lesbians and gay men. The nail bombings of Soho, Brick Lane and Brixton should have taught us the lesson that unity against bigotry and hatred is the only way forward.



Sponsored by
UNISON
1 Mabledon Place,
London WC1
www.unison.org.uk/lesandgay



Join the Lesbian and Gay Coalition Against Racism

I/we wish to affiliate to the Lesbian and Gay Coalition Against Racism

I enclose £25 organisation £5 individual waged £2 individual unwaged, plus donation £.....

Name

Address

..... Postcode

Tel (h) (w)

Fax

Please return to: LAGCAR, c/o NAAR, 28 Commercial Street, London E1.

