

Now more than ever — **Unite against racism and homophobia**

On 7 July, terrorists bombed our multicultural capital, targeting people of every background, age, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and creed. The bombings were designed to divide Londoners. The days after the attacks saw a 600% rise in racist attacks, primarily on Muslims and other Black communities, and two Muslims murdered. LAGCAR welcomed the statements from the Mayor of London, as well as community organisations such as Stonewall and the Muslim Council of Britain, which denounced the bombings and called for unity between all communities. Following the second attempted attacks, we saw a reactionary agenda set by some of the press and some politicians, attempting to pose a “clash of civilisations” between the west and Islam.

This has been accompanied by proposals to clamp down on civil liberties by the government through its Terrorism Bill, which will do little to combat terrorism, but instead risks stigmatising and isolating the Muslim communities, at a time when all communities must be fully included if we are to defeat the destructive minority who are engaged in terrorist activity.



The need for unity is more pressing than ever before. We have seen a sharp rise in hate crimes. Racist attacks increased from 20,058 reports in 2000-1 to 35,022 in 2003-4. Homophobic hate crimes, tragically illustrated by the recent death of Jody Dobrowski, have risen by 8.5% over the past year according to Stonewall.

Black and Lesbian and Gay communities share a common enemy in the far right. The BNP sought to divide our communities in the Barking by-election on July 14th by scapegoating Islam for the bombings and using the picture of the bus that was bombed in Tavistock Square. This backfired, as voters came out to reject their race-

hate, removing their chances of gaining a seat in London, which they had previously lost that month. If we allow division and racism to divide our communities, our enemies, such as the homophobic, racist BNP, will prosper.

We welcome the joint work of MCB and Stonewall on the Single Equalities legislation, and the supportive statements of Stonewall towards the Muslim community following the bombings. We also welcome the campaigns of LGBT Muslim representatives such as Imaan in tackling homophobia and racism.

● LAGCAR is a signatory to the “Only United Communities will defeat terrorism and protect civil liberties”. Sign up now by visiting www.naar.org.uk

Unite against fascism

The British National Party (BNP) confirmed its continued growth at the General Election, recording the highest election results ever cast for a far right party in Britain. In the 2005 general election the BNP's national vote more than quadrupled compared to 2001, rising from 47,129 to 192,750. They also saved a record 34 deposits. These areas are likely to become their target areas for the 2006 local elections, where they intend to increase their council seats, giving them the basis for the national breakthrough they crave, to emulate their counterparts across Europe, where fascist parties hold seats in government.

The BNP's politics of hatred

In 1999 nailbomber David Copeland bombed Black, Asian and Lesbian and Gay communities to turn out a vote for the BNP. In Burnley where they have their largest number of council seats, they put a gay pub landlord out of business. They compare gay men and Asian men to paedophiles. The BNP have been given a lifeline by a climate of increased racism, with the backdrop of a vitriolic debate on asylum seekers and immigration by press and politicians.

It is therefore essential that the bidding war on who can be "toughest" on asylum stops — the BNP will always go further and profit at the ballot box by whipping up racism. This climate has contributed to a general rise in racism against all Black communities, with a particular focus on the Muslim community. BNP leader Nick Griffin was charged earlier this year with incitement to racial hatred after calling Islam "a vicious and wicked faith".

Uniting against the BNP's fascism can stop them

Only a united campaign by those who oppose the BNP's politics of hatred can stop them, by alerting people to the threat posed by the far right and turning out the vote of the majority of people who oppose them. The cutting edge on which they are making advances is by whipping up

racism. In Oldham, the BNP came third in 2001's general election, exploiting claims being made by the local police that racist attacks were being perpetrated by Asians against whites. The Oldham Coalition Against Racism tackled this, exploding the myth and stating the fact that Asians were overwhelmingly the victims of unreported racist attacks. By campaigning against racism, no BNP councillors have been elected. The BNP vote has been halved in the 2005 general election. In contrast to this, in Bradford, legitimacy has been given to the racist myth that Asian men are preying on white girls for under-age sex. Police figures dispel this, with the racial profile for this crime being the same for white

and Asian men. Sadly, local campaigners and authoritative figures have lended legitimacy to this myth. The net result is that the BNP currently has four councillors, scored their third highest vote here last May and recently tried to call a national demo in Keighley against "Racist Asian Rapists".

The BNP were defeated in both Oldham and Millwall a decade ago, by forging an alliance between all those who feel the threat of fascism, to turn out the vote of all those who oppose their politics of hatred. An unremitting anti-racist campaign was pivotal to ensuring that their policies did not gain legitimacy and exposing the racism of the far right, convinced voters to turn out and vote against them. In both areas, the trade union movement actively engaged the local Black communities, faith groups and the Lesbian and Gay communities to build powerful local united alliances. Such alliances are essential to successfully challenge the BNP. Homophobia, or any other prejudice, cannot be 'used' to help fight the BNP — all it does is sow bigger problems for the future and

The BNP's politics of homophobia

The BNP is actively homophobic.

- They have run a homophobic campaign against gay clergy.
- The BNP openly target lesbians and gay men: "We promise to bring back legislation forbidding homosexual acts — thus driving these revolting practices back into the closet where they belong" (BNP General Election manifesto 1997).
- The BNP on AIDS: "Nature is at last taking revenge against the nauseating proliferation of homosexuality" (*Spearhead* 11 July 1983).
- On the nail-bomb attack in Soho: "Dozens of 'gay' demonstrators flaunting their perversion in front of the world's journalists showed why so many people find these creatures so repulsive" (Nick Griffin — *Spearhead* June 1999).
- In the 2005 general election manifesto, the section on "the Armed People — the ultimate protection against invasion or tyranny" states that the 1996 Dunblane massacre of sixteen school children and a teacher was carried out by "a homosexual paedophile".

— stop the BNP in 2006

break up the alliances we need. Sadly, in the 2005 general election, some Searchlight activists 'exposed' the fact that the BNP's candidate in Barking had acted in a gay porn film. They claimed success in turning BNP supporters away from the candidate as a result of this. Although this may have lessened support for that particular candidate, any fuelling of prejudice against lesbians and gay men relies on exploiting and fuelling a climate of intolerance and hatred — the climate the BNP thrives in. Using homophobia to attempt to defeat the BNP will only serve to isolate the Lesbian and Gay community from the anti-fascist movement — a division that we cannot afford at this critical time.

In the run-up to the general election, LAGCAR worked with TUC LGBT campaign and Unite Against Fascism to flyer the Lesbian and Gay community in Soho on the sixth anniversary of the nailbombings, to turn out the vote against the BNP. This was critical as they got their highest national vote in Barking, which



had seen racist attacks soar by 18% in the year that the BNP held a seat. Lesbian and Gay activists played a prominent role in the successful campaign to oust the BNP councillor from this seat, and in preventing them getting re-elected in June.

UAF and LAGCAR also worked with the NUS LGBT Campaign to counter demonstrate against the National Front's picket of

Manchester Pride. Over 100 people including a Holocaust survivor and Labour councillors demonstrated against a handful of NF protestors.

● **Unite Against Fascism will be holding a national conference on February 18th in London around stopping the BNP in the 2006 local elections. For more information contact www.uaf.org.uk or call 020 7833 4916.**

Defend and celebrate multiculturalism

The current debate around integration states that Black communities are "self-segregating" by where they choose to live and be educated. In fact, multiculturalism and diversity ensure greater levels of integration. Prof Danny Dorling of the University of Sheffield points out that "we have not been sleepwalking into segregation by race, but towards ever greater segregation by wealth and poverty." His census analysis shows there are no neighbourhoods in Britain where a single

ethnic minority community is the majority. It is poverty that segregates Black communities from white people.

Institutional racism leaves Black communities in the poorest boroughs, with less job and educational opportunities than others. Black school children are more likely to be excluded than white school children. The 2001 census shows Muslim communities have the highest rate of unemployment of any religion. By negating institutional racism, the current discourse is blaming the victims for the oppression they face. This means the disturbances in

Birmingham are presented as "inter-racial" conflict, instead of a consequence of racist discrimination affecting two disadvantaged communities. Sadly this discourse undermines multiculturalism, which is a generator of economic, cultural and social wealth – London, the most multicultural part of Britain, is also one of its most successful.

We need a positive affirmation of the benefits of multiculturalism, recognising the contribution of all of Britain's communities, whilst taking concrete measures to eradicate endemic institutional racism and discrimination.

lesbian and gay coalition against racism

We need Equality in the Equality Bill

The new Equality Bill, will have far reaching implications for Black and LGBT communities. The Black communities have already expressed concern that under the Bill, the Commission for Racial Equality is due to be abolished, in the 30th anniversary of its inception, with a 'Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) subsuming it. At a time of increased support for the far right and a rise in racist attacks, concerns exist that this will downgrade the resources needed to oppose racism.

The new single Commission will represent six equality strands and have a human rights function. An extensive consultation carried out with the Black communities last year expressed concerns about the loss of the CRE, and the lack of an equivalent replacement in the merged commission.

The CEHR proposal has no criteria for representation of the equality groups it will be serving. There is no guarantee of BME or Lesbian and Gay Commissioners and no committees to govern

work on racism or homophobia respectively. Its budget is proportionately lower than that for the existing commissions it will subsume. Problems allocating these limited resources will be exacerbated by lack of representative structures and of transparency of budget allocation.

LAGCAR welcomes the fact that the Bill provides for a Commissioner who is a disabled person and for a Disability Committee, but notes that the government is opposing the same approach for other groups facing discrimination.

Amendments being advocated in Parliament by Lord Ouseley and others institute clear representative criteria in the selection of Commissioners. These include that at least half of the commissioners must be women and a quarter must be black or ethnic minority, as well as proposals to create six decision-making Equality Committees for all strands including a race committee. The CRE, along with many Black and minority ethnic organisations, supports a race committee. The Disabil-

ity Rights Commission and the Mayor of London are strongly advocating these amendments. But the government opposes these reforms arguing they would be overly prescriptive or prevent unified approaches. Yet without representative structures the Commission's work will be less focussed, informed, organised and transparent than is necessary.

Finally, the diversity of London's population and the size of London's Black and minority ethnic population, the lessons London has for equality policy and the fact that London is the seat of national government means that the CEHR must be based in the capital. Unified approaches from Lesbian and Gay and Black communities can deliver real change. Following the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation on goods and services for religious communities, we welcome the extension of this to the Lesbian and Gay community. Similarly, a unified call from those across the strands on the CEHR could help deliver proper equality in this body.

EVENTS

7th November – 3rd December
Rise student week – a program of cultural events, anti-racism and discussion. Email contactsaar@hotmail.com for details

26th November
National Assembly Against Racism AGM, TUC Congress House. Affiliates and individual members can attend.

18th February
Unite Against Fascism National conference, TUC Congress House, London. Visit www.uaf.org.uk to register.

6th – 9th April
European Social Forum, Athens

16th June – 1st July
Euro Pride parade, London



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Please return to: LAGCAR, 28 Commercial Street, London E1.

