

# The asylum laws we need

**Recently, Sorin Mihai, a gay man facing deportation, won an appeal to remain in this country with his partner. While LAGCAR, along with many other lesbian and gay and anti-racist organisations expressed our warm congratulations to Sorin on this victory, we remain worried, because the outcome of Sorin's case was the exception rather than the rule.**

Out of over 200 cases a year like Sorin's only 10 per cent are successful.  
 Lesbian and gay partnerships, unlike heterosexual ones, do not have to satisfy any 'four year rule' —

that is, show that their relationship has been at least four years long to qualify that it is valid. Moreover, persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation is still not recognised as a valid ground for

claiming asylum.  
 LAGCAR has grave concerns about the discriminatory nature of asylum law generally, but we are also specifically concerned about the additional discrimination which faces asylum seekers who are lesbian and gay, or whose asylum claim relates to persecution because of their sexual orientation. Homophobia and racism are graphically interlinked for lesbian and gay asylum seekers.  
 LAGCAR is also worried about the wider framework of the government's approach to asylum and immigration policy — we share concerns that the government's White Paper breaches pre-election promises to deliver justice to asylum seekers.

Around 10,000 people have been waiting since before 1993 to get an answer from the Home Office, waiting in limbo not knowing whether they can really re-start their lives or whether they are about to be deported.

In response to the crisis being faced by asylum seekers the government announced that it was undertaking a full review of the asylum process. The Home Secretary, Jack Straw MP, said the government wanted a 'firm, fair, fast system', yet the government White Paper on asylum and immigration policy is anything but fair.



Proposals include the complete removal of asylum seekers from the benefits system by introducing a voucher system in order to obtain food and other necessities and the establishment of 'designated housing' forcing asylum seekers into hostel-type accommodation in any part of the country. In countries such as Germany, asylum seekers in such hostels have been targets for arson attacks. Other studies show that the voucher system forces asylum seekers to beg on the

streets or tolerate desperate hardship [see box below for full details of the White Paper and campaigning action].

Such proposals can only make life even more unbearable for asylum seekers in this country. They will extend institutionalised racism.

LAGCAR is calling for the rejection of these proposals and will be supporting campaigning initiatives that are aimed at doing just that. LAGCAR will be arguing that the government must also address the

additional inequalities facing lesbian and gay asylum seekers. We are calling for the recognition of the validity of lesbian and gay sexuality within asylum applications.

LAGCAR exists to take such campaigns into the lesbian and gay community and raise the specific concerns of lesbian and gay asylum seekers within the anti-racist movement. We know that only the broadest alliances will be strong enough to persuade the government to rethink.

## Firmer but not fairer

*demand justice in immigration and asylum*

The next few months will see new legislation on asylum and immigration rights introduced in parliament. The key proposals have already been flagged up in a government White Paper and are of great concern to the anti-racist movement. They include:

- withdrawing benefit rights from all asylum seekers and introducing a system of cashless vouchers.
- compelling asylum seekers to live in 'designated' accommodation.
- extending the use of immigration detention and increasing the powers of detention custody officers.
- requiring financial bonds from visitors needing a visa.
- ending the right of appeal against

deportation for those who have been here for over 7 years.

- granting police powers to the immigration service.
- increasing internal immigration controls.

The National Assembly Against Racism and LAGCAR believes that these proposals will further undermine asylum rights, raise serious issues of civil liberties and human rights and will exacerbate racism. A campaign has been launched to pressure the government to drop these proposals and restore benefit rights to asylum seekers.

*For further details contact: NAAR, 28 Commercial St, London E1 6LS or telephone 0171-247 9907.*

## dance against racism



**DJ's include:**  
**Shorty Blitz (Kiss FM)**

**Organic Audio (Tummy Touch) + special guests**

**Thursday 3rd December, 8 till late @ ULU, Malet Street, London**

**Admission £3**  
jointly organised by

STUDENT ASSEMBLY  
AGAINST RACISM



## Stand against racism and homophobia!

LAGCAR sends its support to firefighters in Manchester who have protested and taken industrial action against racist remarks by the deputy chief fire officer in the city. Don Bramhall, deputy chief fire officer for Greater Manchester, asked a meeting of new recruits if there were any women or gays present and followed this up with the racist remark, 'Well, I'd rather be gay than black'. Such a remark is not only blatantly racist, but can only be taken as a smear against being gay. Despite this offensive conduct, the fire service failed to act, leading to industrial action by the union. Full support to you!

# Working together to fight oppression

During the parliamentary debate on the Crime and Disorder Bill before the summer recess, the government opposed an amendment which would have given homophobic hate crimes a similar criminal status to that of racist attacks. Frontbench spokespeople claimed that this was because the government did not want to dilute its message on racism. While it is reasonable to argue that separate and specific legislation should be advanced on racist violence, on the one hand, and homophobic violence, on the other, the government's case would be more convincing if they had committed themselves to bringing forward such legislation on both areas.

Many respected organisations and individuals from the black community supported the amendment on lesbian and gay hate crimes.

LAGCAR recognises that the way forward involves forging alliances between the black communities and lesbian and gay communities. We reject the compartmentalisation of identity politics, accepting instead the vital intersection of ethnicity and sexuality.

For example a recent report from the lesbian and gay anti-violence organisation, GALOP, has shown that lesbians and gay men from the black

community who have experienced violence have argued that such attacks were generally motivated by both racism and homophobia.

Before the election, Jack Straw pledged to lesbian and gay activists that the Labour Party has 'a strategy of zero tolerance' to make the streets safe for everyone regardless of skin colour or sexual preference. This has failed to materialise.

Regardless of the parliamentary tactics it remains clear that action on both racist and homophobic violence remains necessary. Legislation

to deal with hate crimes such as homophobic assaults would be a step in the right direction. We encourage you to remind your MP and the government of both of these priorities.

## Public services for lesbians and gay men

Unison has published a charter 'Best value, Equal value' as part of the



union's contribution to discussion about the future of public services. The charter is aimed at stimulating debate about lesbian and gay equality in the delivery of public services. It highlights ten key areas: fairness at work, challenging racism, access for all, learning together, care for our communities, equality of justice, a roof over our heads, recognition of our families, respect for old and young alike, inclusion at our leisure.

The views of lesbian and gay organisations are actively sought. For further details contact Carola Towle, Acting National Lesbian and Gay Officer, Unison, Civic House, 20 Grand Depot Road, London SE18 6SF.

### LONDON LESBIAN AND GAY SWITCHBOARD IS CALLING YOU!!

My name is Denroy and I am a Black Volunteer for London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard. I was a little apprehensive in joining the organisation as I felt that it would be dominated by white middle class men who had little or no experience of the Black Gay Man.

I am very pleased to say that the volunteers at Switchboard made me feel most welcome and involved. I have taken part in many activities and have acquired new skills, such as interviewing new volunteers and dealing with the public at the information tent at Pride. There is excellent training on equal opportunities issues, gender training, sexual health and legal matters. Unfortunately, there are not many members from the ethnic community at Switchboard and I am here to let you know that Switchboard needs you. It's a great feeling when you talk to someone and they say "well you don't understand as you're not from my community" and you say "in fact I am".

Give the recruitment line a ring now on 0171 837 7606



lesbian and gay coalition against racism

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*Pull the  
plugs  
on the  
BNP!*



The British National Party is reportedly trying to put up enough candidates in next May's elections to the European Parliament to qualify for free media publicity. Many people were angered when this fascist, racist and homophobic group were allowed to broadcast their message of hate through television and radio prior to the 1997 general election. LAGCAR is calling on supporters to write to the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, stating opposition to allowing the BNP free air time and also to write to the BBC and other networks. If it looks likely that the BNP may reach their target LAGCAR will be calling on people to support protests against promotion of the BNP's message in the media. Keep in touch for details.



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20 Grand Depot Road,  
London SE18 6SF

# Root out racism in the police!

The evidence to the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence has uncovered both direct and institutional racism at every level of the police and criminal justice system.

The Lawrence family have rendered the entire struggle against racism a great service by their determination and personal strength in pursuing justice for themselves and their son. LAGCAR supports the demand that, arising from the inquiry, decisive action must be taken to root out racism from the metropolitan and other police forces. The police should be accountable to and fully representative of the communities they are meant to serve. A police force which is virtually all white, in which racists, sexists, homophobes are commonplace, and in which brutality and corruption go unpunished should not be tolerated. Now that the Lawrence inquiry has moved



*Neville Lawrence speaking at a recent NAAR conference*

way beyond the Scarman Report of 1981, which exonerated the police as an institution from allegations of racism, saying the problem was one of a 'few bad apples', the government must act to bring the entire force into line with the recommendations of the inquiry.

**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.

