

newsletter

Summer 2004

lesbian and gay coalition
against racism
National Assembly Against Racism

Anti-racists vote to stop the BNP

On 10 June, lesbians and gay men, alongside the trade unions, Unite Against Fascism, the Lesbian and Gay Coalition Against Racism and national and local organisations, prevented the fascist British National Party (BNP) from gaining a toehold in the London Assembly and the European Parliament.

Thursday 10 June saw European, local and London Assembly elections taking place, with the BNP seeing it as an opportunity to make further advances. Although the BNP polled high votes in some areas, it failed to gain seats in the London Assembly and the European Parliament, and only gained 5 more councillors. The BNP came within 6,000 votes of getting a London Assembly member, and gained over 750,000 votes nationally in the European Elections. Their breakthrough was only prevented by an alliance of lesbian and gay organisations together with anti-racist campaigns, trade unions, and local communities, who mobilised the vote against the BNP. We must continue to campaign to mobilise the anti-

BNP majority in future elections, so the BNP does not make a major breakthrough, and spread further its message of racism, homophobia and hatred. We must also campaign to unseat the BNP where they have councillors.

European Parliament

The day before the vote BNP leader Nick Griffin claimed: 'The British National Party is on target to take between 14 and 16 per cent of the Euro vote in our key regions, winning a record number of council seats, positions on the Greater London Assembly, and breaking through with three or four MEPs'. In all three electoral arenas, the BNP failed to reach its own targets.

When French fascist Jean-

Marie Le Pen entered Britain at the invitation of Nick Griffin earlier this year, it was widely touted that the BNP were poised to join the European group of fascists in the European parliament. It hasn't happened. That is down to a lot of hard work from the lesbian and gay community, the trade unions and community and faith organisations.

The BNP did not win any Euro-seats. However, the BNP vote continued to rise, dramatically in some areas. In the regional elections to the European Parliament, the BNP vote rose more than six-fold in Yorkshire and Humberside (from 1.2 percent to 8.0) and four-fold in the West Midlands (from 1.7 to 7.5). The BNP were prevented from gaining any seats by an increased turnout, with lesbians and gay men casting their votes to oppose the BNP's racist and homophobic policies.

Local Elections

The number of BNP councillors has increased from 17 to 22 — a shocking rise, but nothing like the scale that the BNP were predicting. However, its breakthrough in areas like Epping Forest, where three BNP councillors were elected, will give them additional opportunities to spread their

lesbian and gay coalition against racism



message of hatred and intolerance. In almost all the areas where the BNP was already established — and therefore where anti-fascist campaigns were strongest — the BNP performed far worse than expected. In a whole number of areas the BNP have been exposed.

London Assembly

Although support for the BNP on the 'top-up list' increased from 1.99 per cent in 2000 to 4.71 per cent in 2004, this did not enable the BNP to cross the 5 per cent threshold necessary to get a London Assembly member.

In the run-up to the elections, LAGCAR worked with ILGA, UNISON and Stonewall to call initiatives to bring out the 'pink' vote. A forum was called in London on 'Unite Against Fascism — Stop Racism and Homophobia' which was addressed by speakers from Stonewall, UNISON Lesbian and Gay Committee, ILGA and LAGCAR. The meeting was well attended by activists, trade union representatives, faith groups, students, local government and race equality officers. A press release urging lesbians and gay men to vote was covered in the *Pink Paper* in the week of the elections.

The BNP's politics of homophobia

■ **The BNP is actively homophobic.** They are currently running a homophobic campaign against gay clergy. David Copeland, who nailbombed Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho, was an ex-member of the BNP.

■ **The BNP openly target lesbians and gay men:** 'We promise, in addition, 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* 111, July 1983)

■ **The nail-bomb attack in Soho:** 'Dozens of "gay" demonstrators flaunting their perversion in front of the world's journalists showed just why so many ordinary people find these creatures so repulsive.' (Nick Griffin, *Spearhead*, June 1999)

■ **banning 'the promotion of homosexuality':**

'homosexuality is wrong. We reject totally the recent trend in the media to portray it as a "valid lifestyle choice", morally equivalent to normal sexuality and to the rearing of families... We believe that the promotion of homosexuality should be banned not just in schools, but also in the mass media.'

Identity, the BNP's 'official monthly magazine'

■ **'Predatory' pervers:** 'we believe that young boys should be protected from the attentions of predatory older pervers by returning the age of consent for homosexual sex to 21.

'This does not mean that we want to persecute individual homosexuals, most of whom cannot help the way they were born, but neither are we willing to grant them the "right" to flaunt their deviancy and to try to win new recruits to their sad, disease-ridden lifestyle.'

ibid

Asylum rights must be respected

The latest attempt to clamp down on asylum rights has been a combination of proposals in Parliament as part of the fifth piece of legislation in the last eleven years. These attacks are being justified as being necessary to tackle the rise of racism — but it is clear that, rather than stopping racism, further restriction of asylum rights fuels the rise of racist hostilities against all black communities and gives a life line to the extremist policies of the far right.

The measures contained in the current Asylum and Immigration Bill include severely reducing asylum seekers access to judicial scrutiny of asylum decisions, when one in 5 asylum decisions are overturned by appeals. This proposal has been severely criticised in the

House of Lords and has led to the government conceding greater scrutiny by the courts, but limiting legal support. Other proposals are to take away children of failed asylum seekers into care and removing legal aid from those seeking asylum. In addition to the bill, legal aid is being restricted overall to asylum seekers, which will adversely affect the most vulnerable asylum seekers' ability to successfully gain refugee status.

These draconian policies are accompanied by inflammatory rhetoric by politicians, fuelling sections of the tabloid media who continue their daily diet of anti-asylum hysteria. This can only lead to a rise in racism and hostility towards asylum seekers and move Britain further away from its international obligations. It will

continue undermining the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, which defines refugee status and outlines the approach by signatory countries for the treatment of asylum seekers.

Furthermore, the failure to confront racist scapegoating of asylum seekers contributes to myths and lies becoming firmly embedded in British society. Britain takes less than 2 per cent of the world's refugees, ranking eighth in the EU on number of asylum seekers per 1000 inhabitants. Migrant workers make an overall contribution to the economy, and standards rise in schools with asylum seeker children.

● Visit www.naar.org.uk to sign the statement against the Asylum and Immigration Bill and to download our pack on the Myths and Facts on Asylum.

Fighting Islamophobia and discrimination

On 5 June, the Safra conference on 'Strategies for Empowerment and Capacity Building' saw a group of 20 women come together to join in a programme of workshops and speakers. The event was unique because it focused solely on tackling misconceptions that cause stigmatisation and discrimination of Muslim LGBT people as a result of their sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender.

The Safra Project works on issues relating to lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women who identify as Muslim. It deals with the issues they

face, and the combination of prejudices based on sexual orientation, gender, religion and culture that are insufficiently understood, or addressed, in the mainstream.

Delegates participated in debates on 'Sexuality, Gender & Islam: legal and theological though' and 'Accepting ourselves: dealing with fears, guilt and depression' - which included findings on mental health services. These sessions generated a rich contribution from the women who had come together and was followed by a round-group discussion on 'Coming out' to family and friends. Here, it was

encouraged to share experiences and unpicking the consequences, as well as an opportunity to meet other Muslim LGBTQ women to build a network and social support groups.

The conference also identified key needs and issues relating to Muslim LGBTQ women and facilitated access to information and resources that would empower us to deal with complex social and legal issues we face.

● For more information contact: Safra Project, P.O. Box 35929, London, N17 0WB. Email: info@safraproject.org

lesbian and gay coalition against racism

lesbian and gay coalition against racism

FREE anti-racist music festival celebrating London's diversity

respect

12 noon-8.30pm
Saturday 17th July 2004
Victoria Park, London E3
 (nearest tubes: Mile End and 277 bus)

- Choice FM stage
- Sunrise Mela stage
- Comedy Tent
- Big Cuba Tent
- World Dance stage
- Roots stage
- Children's play area and funfair
- Food ● Crafts
- Bars ● Exhibitions

featuring:
Big Brovaz,
 TY, The Selecter, Raghev,
 FYA, Shystie,
 BBC Asian Network present:
 Rishi Rich,
 Juggy D
 & Apache Indian
 plus more acts and special
 guests to be announced

Organised by: **GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY**

in partnership with:  **SERTUC**  **respect** 

Produced by The Mean Fiddler Organisation and the Worker's Beer Company

LAGCAR is online!

Visit us at
www.NAAR.org.uk/
 LAGCAR

Sponsored by
UNISON

1 Mabledon Place,
 London WC1
www.unison.org.uk/out



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

lesbian and gay coalition against racism

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