

Unite Against Fascism

Eight weeks to defeat the BNP

Days of action: 4 April, 2 May & 6 June

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
AGAINST
RACISM

UPDATE

April 2004

The campaign to stop the BNP gaining a national platform by winning European Parliament seats or a seat in the Greater London Assembly is gathering pace with planned days of action in London and around the country. One million copies of the first national leaflet have been produced and are available from the Unite Against Fascism office. You can email your order to unite@natfhe.org.uk

The campaign now has the active support of many celebrities. Musicians as varied as Ms Dynamite, So Solid Crew's Asher D and Billy Bragg, actors Jason Statham and Jason Flemyng, ex-Eastenders actors Bindya Solanki and Dean Gaffney, Corrie actors Julie Hesmondhalgh and Shobna Gulati have signed up to the campaign. Two major concerts are being planned in Manchester and London in the run-up to the elections on 10 June which will elect representatives to the European Parliament, the Greater London Assembly and local councils.

Proportional representation and list systems mean that the BNP will only need 5% of the vote in London to gain a seat in the Assembly. Only an increased turnout of voters in London can stop the BNP from gaining a seat. UAF is urging all those who do not wish to see a fascist in London government to register to vote by the 13 April and to use their vote on 10 June election day.

You can get a voter registration form from www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/your-vote/rollingreg.cfm Alternatively, you can contact your local council to register or check that you are on the electoral roll. **You must do this before the 13 April to be entitled to vote at the elections.**

For more information, to get involved in the campaign and help with leaflet distribution or in any other way, contact the UAF office on 020 7388 4916 or email unite@natfhe.org.uk

Debate on asylum must respect human rights

The government has been forced into re-thinking a controversial proposal in the forthcoming Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Bill which would have ended access to higher courts to challenge immigration and asylum decisions by the Home Office and the proposed new single tier tribunal. Opposition to the proposed measure included the Lord Chief Justice Lord Woolf, three cross party committees and significant rebellions in the House of Commons. The Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer, in announcing the withdrawal of Clause 14 conceded judicial oversight of the higher courts. However he emphasised the government's priority of reducing 'abuse in the system' and the length of appeals, despite the fact that there are already measures to prevent unfounded appeals. Currently, the appeals process overturns 1 in 5 initial Home Office decisions, criticised by Amnesty International for poor quality information and advice, which lead to wrong decisions being made. Refugee community organisations and legal practitioners have raised concerns about possible new proposals, as any erosion of the current two tier system would create inequality within our justice system.

NAAR and ILPA have set up the Coalition Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill (CAAIB), a broad coalition of over 170 organisations, to campaign against the measures. CAAIB is voicing opposition to other proposals in the Bill which include making families destitute who have come to the end of the application process which could mean their children are taken into care, as a means of coercion into accepting deportation. The Bill proposes imprisoning people arriving without valid travel documents for up to two years. Asylum seekers are often unable to approach their own authorities for passports or exit visas, being reliant on agents, forged documents or clandestine entry in order to seek safety from persecution. This measure contravenes Article 31 of the Refugee Convention, which states that refugees should not be prosecuted on account of illegal entry. CAAIB is encouraging activists to continue lobbying MPs around the Bill, in the run up to its final reading in the House of Commons in late April.

This Bill is the fifth piece of asylum and immigration legislation in just over a decade – each has further eroded asylum seekers' rights. Government policy and the debate on asylum is centred around pandering to the reactionary press for political gain, rather than respecting asylum rights and promoting the economic benefits of migration.

Most recently, hysteria is being whipped up by the Tories around the EU accession workers and East European migrant workers. Instead of rebutting the Tories, the government is reducing benefits to migrant workers, which contradicts the government's own evidence showing that migrant workers make a "disproportionate" contribution to the economy, paying £2.5bn more in tax each year than they take out in services. Draconian policies on asylum and immigration lead to tragedies like the deaths of the 20 cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay, who were unable to access legitimate, safe work.

The hysterical debate on asylum also creates a context in which racism and fascism are able to thrive. The only way to redress this is by creating a positive climate on asylum and immigration, which begins with respecting asylum rights.

Lobby your MP in time for the final reading in Parliament - Download model letters and briefings at www.naar.org.uk

Roger Sylvester: MPA overturns decision to fund the legal costs of police officers

Still No Justice for Roger Sylvester

Public meeting organised by the Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign

Sunday 18 April 2004 5-7pm

West Indian Cultural Centre, 9 Clarendon Road, London N8 0DJ

After waiting for four and half years, the inquest into the death of Roger Sylvester passed a verdict of unlawful killing in October after over four weeks of detailed evidence and cross examination of witnesses at the St Pancras Coroner's Court. The officers applied for and won the right to judicially review the verdict, to the dismay of the Sylvester family and their supporters. A small group of members of the MPA voted to cover the officers' legal costs of this challenge to the inquest verdict.

On 25 March, the full meeting of the MPA, attended by the members of the family and their supporters, overturned this decision, instead agreeing that the officers would only receive financial backing if the family's costs were also met by the MPA. Although the family welcomed this decision, they highlighted the fact that the Police Federation, which backs the eight officers, already has financial resources to cover the legal costs, whereas the family has not been granted legal aid. Although important, the concession is a hollow victory, as the MPA should not be supporting officers who have been found guilty of unlawful killing in a Coroner's Court. All NAAR members and supporters should attend the public meeting organised by RSJC on 18 April.

Muslims face increased stop and search

Muslim organisations have drawn attention to the disproportionate levels of stop and search that affect Muslim communities, particularly since 11 September. The Muslim Council of Britain has linked the increase to the rise in Islamophobia generally in British society. It is clearly the case that Muslims are being targeted and new anti-terrorist laws are being used against them in a consistent way. NAAR is working with Muslim community organisations in countering Islamophobia.

European Social Forum 2004 is coming to London

The third European Social Forum will be taking place in London between 14 to 17 October 2004. Last year, over 50,000 people from all over Europe attended the ESF in Paris in November last year. The ESF is a major three-day long conference dealing with issues as varied as racism, the rise of fascism, the environment, social justice and international issues. More recently in December 2003, over 100,000 people attended the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India under the slogan 'Another World Is Possible'.

NAAR has agreed to take part in the organisation and development of the programme for the ESF in London. It is particularly important to develop the anti-racist agenda and the priorities in the fight against fascism across Europe. The event offers possibilities of creating important links across Europe and moving the agenda forward on issues such as the ban on the hijab. For more information on how to get involved, contact Milena Buyum at the NAAR office.