

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
AGAINST
RACISM

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Summer newsletter

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June elections: far right stopped in its tracks



By Sabby Dhalu, Joint Secretary UAF

The London Assembly, European Parliament and local government elections on June 10th were a significant moment in the fight against racist hatred and the threat of fascism. The British National Party posed a real danger of making its biggest electoral breakthrough in its history and failed to achieve it.

This outcome which must be welcomed by all those opposed to the hatred and division peddled by the BNP has to be put in context: in London the BNP came within less than 6,000 votes of an Assembly seat. In the European elections, they received eight times the number of votes that were cast for them in 1999 — the last European elections. These results show how important it is not to become complacent.

Without a concerted national campaign, the outcome could have been very different. The formation of Unite Against Fascism, a new national campaign bringing together the trade union movement, the anti-racist and anti-fascist movement, the African, Caribbean and Asian communities,

faith communities, lesbian and gay communities and all those opposed to fascism played a pivotal role in the BNP's defeat.

BNP's electoral performance

The BNP received a very high national vote with 808,200 votes (4.9%), up from the 102,607 they received in 1999.

In London, the BNP gained 90,365 votes — 4.71% of the votes cast. The BNP were 5,720 votes short of the 5% barrier needed to win a seat on the Assembly, almost doubled from the 47,670 votes they received in 2000.

The BNP failed to win a European Parliament seat by only 23,185 votes in the West Midlands and 32,574 votes in the North West where they received 134,958 votes (6.4%).

The BNP gained 14 councillors in June, bringing their total to 21 — including 4 in Bradford and 3 in Epping Forest.

It is clear from the results that the increased voter turnout across the country greatly helped the outcome

of the elections against the BNP. For instance, the turnout in the North West was one of the highest in the country at 40.9% as opposed to 19.4% in 1999. In London the turnout was also higher than in 2000.

Next steps in the campaign



Unite Against Fascism will continue campaigning against the BNP in the run up to the next general election. The European elections helped the BNP to increase its geographical spread and open up new areas of support. The BNP will seek to use the general election to create pools of support for local election breakthroughs and for success in elections conducted under proportional representation. Although the BNP did not make the breakthrough they expected they came very close. With over 800,000 votes nationally the BNP continues to pose a serious threat to the fabric of our multicultural society.

For further information and to join UAF call 020 7833 4916 or email unite@natfhe.org.uk

ANOTHER WORLD
IS POSSIBLE

European Social Forum

London, 14-17 October 2004

By Milena Buyum, Vice-Chair NAAR

The European Social Forum (ESF) is a massive annual gathering of tens of thousands of people from all over the world to discuss alternatives to challenges faced by our societies. The last ESF in Paris saw over 50,000 people attend wide ranging events including plenaries, seminars and workshops; films and other cultural events; and a massive demonstration showing the strength of people who share the vision of another world.

With the current wave of racism, Islamophobia and increased support for the far right across Europe, it is vital that the ESF is used as a space where strategies to combat these trends are discussed.

The third ESF in London offers the exciting possibility of exchanges with others from all corners of the world on views and strategies to combat racism, the rise of fascism and the far right, the threats to asylum and immigration rights, the ban on the hijab and the rise of Islamophobia

amongst many other issues.

NAAR has been playing a key role in the organisation of the ESF, particularly in ensuring anti-racism is at the heart of this year's event. It is vital that the event reflects the diversity of London, with the presence of all sections of our multicultural society. There is also commitment to equal representation of women and to strong representation from black communities on platforms of the ESF.

NAAR is organising several meetings in the context of the ESF including:

- **Hijab: a woman's right to choose;**
- **Respect not racism: why multiculturalism must be defended;**
- **Racist attacks, policing and institutional racism.**

For more information you can visit the ESF website at www.fse-esf.org or contact NAAR.

Hands off Asylum rights respected

The latest piece of legislation in Parliament sees a number of attacks on asylum rights. These are being justified as being necessary to stop the politics of racism gaining new ground. 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.

A number of measures contained in the current Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc) Bill will



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restrict asylum rights. These include severely reducing asylum seekers access to judicial scrutiny of asylum decisions, when one in five asylum decisions are overturned by appeals. Other measures include putting children into care when asylum seeker families have come to the end of the application process, and imprisoning those arriving without documentation, despite the fact that fleeing persecution often means escaping without documents.

A number of new amendments tabled into the Bill at the last minute will

further enshrine discrimination. The proposal to restrict marriage to foreign nationals has been met with criticism from faith groups, civil rights groups, the Mayor of London and the cross parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights. The measure undermines the right to family life and will discriminate against the black communities, as well as attack the fundamental human right to choose who to marry.

These draconian policies are accompanied by inflammatory rhetoric, which fuels some tabloid newspapers' barrage of anti-asylum hysteria, leading to further rise in racism and hostility towards asylum seekers. Draconian policies have created a chaotic asylum system, undermining human rights and inflicting misery upon vulnerable people, whilst setting a context that has allowed the far right to profit at the ballot box with racist views. This must be tackled by creating an environment in which asylum seekers' rights are welcomed and respected. Telling the truth about the contribution of asylum seekers and refugees would be a very important step forward.

Some facts

Britain takes less than 2 per cent of the world's refugees ranking eighth in the European Union on number of asylum seekers per 1000 inhabitants. Migrant workers contribute 10 per cent more to the economy than they take from it, whilst OFSTED reports that asylum seeker children increase schools' standards.

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

New international campaign against the ban on hijab

The Assembly for the Protection of Hijab was launched on 12 July at a successful conference at City Hall in London. The campaign was initiated by the Muslim Association of Britain, Liberty and NAAR along with a number of other organisations and is planning initiatives to raise awareness of the impact of the French ban on the hijab, introduced in February 2004.

This law openly institutionalises discrimination of religious minorities as it applies to the Jewish cap and the Sikh turban as well as to the hijab. However, there can be no doubt that its primary target is the 5 million strong Muslim community in France. It has to be put in the context of the rise in racism and post 9/11 rise of Islamophobia in French society, demonstrated by the far right leader Le Pen's 2002 presidential election result, in which he received six million votes in the second round.



Under the French law, girls are not allowed to wear the hijab when they attend school. A recent ruling in the European Court of Human Rights upheld a similar ban in Turkey suggesting it did not breach the European Convention on Human Rights.

For more information and to get involved, visit www.prohijab.net or email info@prohijab.net.



Dates for your diary:

July

- 24 July — Leicester
- 23 July — London
- 30 July — Liverpool

Government consultation on merged Commission for Equality and Human Rights

Have your say — visit www.blink.org.uk for more details

September

- 11 September, 9am - 5.30pm
London Schools and the Black Child conference III: 'Reaching for the Stars'. Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London SW1
Booking forms available from Diane Abbott MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Tel: 020 7219 4426 or email: lsbc@hush.com.
Closing date for registration 3rd September 2004

- 16 September, 7pm
The Stephen Lawrence Annual Memorial Lecture. Given by David Lammy MP. Conference Centre, Church House, Dean's Yard, Westminster. Deadline 20th August — tel: 0207 631 4550.

October

- 14 - 17 October
European Social Forum Alexandra Palace. For more information visit www.fse-esf.org email ukesoffice@gn.apc.org or phone 020 8809 5347

- 30 October, 12 noon
United for Justice - No more deaths in custody - Trafalgar Sq
National annual demonstration organised by the United Families and Friends Campaign in memory of those who have died in police custody visit www.uffc.org for more details

November

- 30 November
'Celebrate Education and Diversity' The Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust
Black Tie Dinner 2004, Dorchester Hotel Park Lane. Book by 29th October. Details: www.stephenlawrence.org.uk



Student Assembly Against Racism

SAAR is the student wing of the National Assembly Against Racism and ensures students are active in the fight against racism on campus and in the community. SAAR wants to unite all students against the BNP, campaign against racist attacks and murders, end racist policing, campaign for full implementation of the Lawrence

Report, oppose racism in education, defend asylum rights and increase black representation. If you are interested in our campaigns, setting up a group or holding Freshers' stalls in your college or university, get in touch and get involved!

Tel: 020 7247 9907 or Email: contactsaar@hotmail.com

Make an anti-racist pledge today:

Join NAAR



The National Assembly Against Racism campaigns against racism in all its manifestations. With national black organisations playing a leading role — in alliance with the Jewish and Muslim communities, the trade unions, the student movement, religious groups and many others, NAAR has set about building a mass anti-racist movement uniting all those who believe racism must be fought and not appeased.

Name.....
Address.....
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Tel..... Email.....

Affiliation rates: Individuals waged: £10 unwaged/students: £3; Organisations Local unfunded: £15; National unfunded/regional/local funded: £25 National trade unions/funded organisations: £65. Please make cheques payable to NAAR and return to: NAAR, 28 Commercial St, London E1 6LS.

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