

Celebrate multiculturalism — get active against racism

Ruqayyah Collector,
NUS Black Students Officer

Britain is a dynamic and successful multicultural society. Our college and university campuses are often powerful examples of how diversity enriches our cultural life and economy. The massive contribution that successive generations of new migrants have brought to this country should be celebrated.

However, recent attacks on the idea of multiculturalism have painted it as a 'failed experiment' that 'divides rather than unites', and claimed that because of this British society is 'sleepwalking into segregation'. Black communities themselves are being blamed for the systematic disadvantage they suffer, be it in employment, housing or in education. Much of this rhetoric has been directed against the Muslim community, who have seen Islamophobia soar in recent years.

In reality all the evidence points to the success of our multicultural society. Far from the media portrayals, the Trades Union Congress has shown that immigration has not depressed jobs or wages. Treasury figures show that immigration is responsible for around 10 per cent of economic growth. Research by academics has demonstrated that society is becoming more integrated, not less, with racist housing policies and economic disadvantage due to racism often the real barrier to social mobility.

This diversity is not only positive, it is necessary. Without the contributions of migrants many hospitals, schools and universities would be unable to function.

The hard-fought-for framework of multiculturalism is based on mutual respect and the right of people to lead their lives as they wish, as long as it does no harm to others. Alongside strong action against discrimination, this is the only way to achieve a cohesive, integrated society.

It attempts to undermine this multicultural framework which create the danger of division, and scapegoating other cultures and ethnic minorities only emboldens racists and fascists such as the

British National Party, who have seen support increase year on year since 2001.

The effects are felt on campuses too. Last year suggestions by the government that university staff should spy on Muslim and 'Asian-looking' students were condemned by the NUS, trade unions and others. An agenda of 'cohesion' and forced assimilation has been aggressively pursued by some Vice Chancellors and college principals, who have attempted to close Islamic Societies or ban the wearing of Islamic veils.

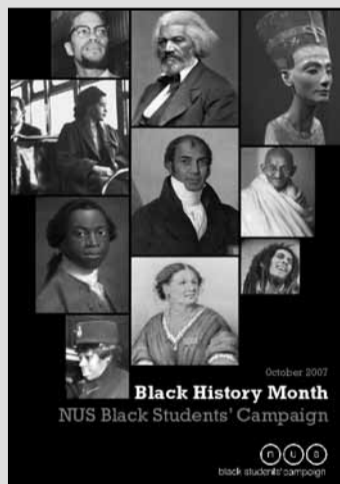


Our multicultural society should be celebrated. Students can help by challenging racism and other barriers that prevent people from playing a full role in the student movement and society.

October: Black History Month

In our schools and colleges, and throughout society, the enormous positive contributions that have been made historically by Black communities are often sidelined or ignored altogether. This under representation undermines the standing of Black people in society by marginalizing their role in helping to build it.

Black History Month, which takes place each October, is an opportunity for all of us to remember the neglected stories of Black communities and individuals in



Britain. Events are taking place across the country looking at key moments in Black British history and honouring often forgotten individuals such as Mary Seacole and Shapurji Saklatvala, the first Black MP, elected in 1922.

The NUS Black Students' Campaign has produced a briefing and posters to help you promote Black History Month on your campus.

For more information email Ruqayyah Collector, NUS Black Students' Officer: ruqs@nus.org.uk

Slavery bicentenary marked

Rachel Earlington, Bradford Uni. SAAR

2007 marks the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. For over 150 years, Britain was the dominant slave-dealing nation in the world, establishing a barbaric system that relied on the forced transportation of generations of people from Africa to work on plantations in the Caribbean. Up to 30 million African people died, either in the appalling conditions crossing the Atlantic or when they had arrived, where many

were literally tortured or worked to death. Many died bravely resisting slavery and eventually forced the British to take action in 1807.

To justify murder and torture on an industrial scale, black people had to be declared inferior or not human – the legacy of that racism and inequality persists today. A national memorial day and formal apology from the Prime Minister for the crimes of Britain and its institutions would greatly help Britain acknowledge and begin to seriously tackle

that damaging legacy. SAAR is joining calls from UNESCO, Diane Abbott and Dawn Butler MPs, the Mayor of London, the NUS Black Students' Campaign and others to make the 23rd August an annual national day of memorial, marking the beginning of the first successful uprising of enslaved Africans in Haiti in 1791.

The NUS Black Students' Campaign has a toolkit and other materials that you can use to publicise the bicentenary — contact Ruqs@nus.org.uk for information.

No fascism on Facebook: Stop the BNP

Bryony Shanks, Womens' Officer,
Sheffield University

Over the summer Unite Against Fascism (UAF) exposed how fascist British National Party groups on Facebook are being used to spread a message of violent race hate. The investigation uncovered images of Ku Klux Klan members posing with a sword under the subtitle "Local BNP meeting, blacks welcome". The group's description calls on people to join to "help them fight evil and win the war of cleansing Britain" and includes a comment stating "If it aint white it aint right". The "vote BNP and save the world" group incites lynchings of black people.

Several major companies have withdrawn advertising from Facebook including Vodafone and First Direct as a result of the pages. Facebook have already removed one image from a BNP group following pressure from Facebook users. Now, parliamentarians have joined thousands of students, NUS and others in calling for Facebook to ban all such BNP groups which are against the Facebook code of conduct.

The Facebook pages further serve to expose the BNP as a dangerous fascist party that stands in the tradition of Hitler's Nazis who tried to annihilate entire communities and destroyed human rights and democracy.

In May's local elections the BNP won the largest ever vote for a fascist party in local elections, advancing into new areas of the country and standing an unprecedented number of candidates. Next May, it aims to win a seat on the London Assembly where in 2004 the BNP came within 0.1% of what would have been a significant breakthrough.

The BNP are increasingly targeting students. An attempt by BNP leader Nick Griffin to speak at Bath University last term was only prevented by a huge campaign, mobilising hundreds of students and involving trade unions, Unite Against Fascism (UAF), SAAR and NUS.

You can make a difference by signing a campaign postcard against the BNP on Facebook or signing the petition at www.uaf.org.uk. You can also help organise voter registration drives to maximise the anti-BNP vote in the elections and Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations on your campus. Students should get involved in UAF – a broad-based campaign which unites all those threatened by fascism to build a powerful opposition to the BNP.



Students 'rise' against racism

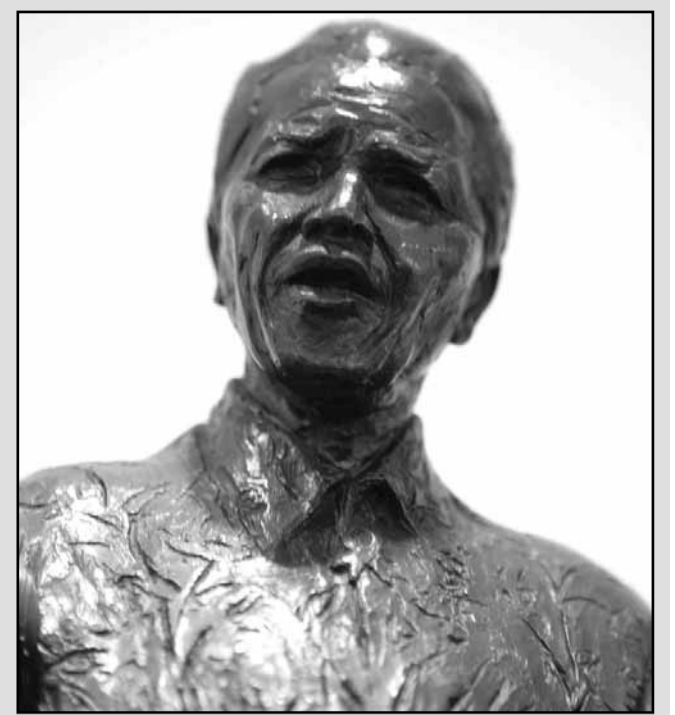
In July, tens of thousands flocked to Finsbury Park in London to enjoy Rise: London United Against Racism, an annual festival organised by the Mayor of London, the National Assembly Against Racism and the South East Region TUC. It is the largest event of its kind in Europe aimed at celebrating our multicultural society and encouraging people to challenge racism. Hundreds of students volunteered on the day to make it a success.



Student Rise

November will see the third annual Student Rise, a series of events taking place on campuses across the country. Supported in London by the Mayor and co-ordinated nationally by the NUS Black Students' Campaign and the Student Assembly Against Racism, it seeks to take the Rise anti-racist message into our colleges and universities. Previous years have seen students organise a wide range of events including speaker meetings and film showings, food and cultural fairs and a Diwali festival in the Royal Albert Hall.

• To get involved in Student Rise on your campus, email us at contactsaar@hotmail.com.



Statue of Nelson Mandela unveiled at Parliament

In August, hundreds came to witness Prime Minister Gordon Brown unveil a statue of legendary human rights campaigner Nelson Mandela, the first person democratically elected President of South Africa following the fall of the racist Apartheid government in the early 1990s. The statue was the culmination of a six-year campaign by Mayor of London Ken Livingstone, anti-racist and anti-Apartheid activists and others.

Nelson Mandela himself addressed the crowds, and said that more action was needed to combat racism, discrimination and poverty. It is vital that students remember the horrific history of apartheid and the sacrifices made by those who struggled against it.

Anti-deportation campaign success

By Flores Sukula, student asylum seeker

On 23rd August, the High Court ruled that it was unlawful for the government to continue with its plan to deport 35 Congolese refugees, including 15 children, back to the Democratic Republic of Congo before a tribunal, expected in September, considered their safety. This partial success was the result of a campaign backed by the Refugee Council, the National Union of Journalists, Liberty, the National Assembly Against Racism and others.

My friend Lufu Ndombasi was deported to the Congo in July and hasn't been heard of since. He was

detained at the airport and taken away. We still live in fear for our very lives. We are still fighting for justice for the Ndombasi family. Many experts agree that torture and death are very real possibilities for those who return.

All we want to do is live here and contribute to society – I've just finished my course at Bolton Sixth Form College and been accepted for a university place in Bolton. I want to be a midwife and dream of helping people but it is made very difficult by barriers placed in my way – I cannot afford the fees.

We depend on you to help us to stay here and keep on living, for the rights of all of us and a better world.

Government's equalities shake up must strengthen not weaken rights

Bellavia Ribeiro Addy, NUS Black Students' Cttee

The government is in the process of transforming current inadequate equalities legislation and institutions. The process has the potential to allow a once in a generation leap forward, levelling up legislation in all areas to achieve equality including racial equality. However, the government's proposals have been met with dismay by equality campaigners across the spectrum as they dilute existing safeguards and shift the blame of inequality away from well documented discrimination onto individual choices and ambition. This framework threatens to roll back decades of anti-racist gains. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has slammed the plans as 'a repudiation of the Stephen Lawrence enquiry' as they propose to end the positive enforceable duty for public bodies such as universities to promote racial equality - won as a result of the enquiry's findings of widespread institutional discrimination.

The government must now take on board the positive proposals in submissions to its consultation, including from the NUS, trade unions and equalities organisations.

Earlier in the year, the government decided to abolish the CRE and other equalities bodies and replace them from the 1st October with the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. This new body has no guarantee of Black representation and a weakened remit and budget to tackle racism. The creation of the CRE in the 1970s was a step forward in the anti-racist struggle and its abolition now is a setback.

Students must be vigilant that such attacks on self-organisation do not find their way into the student movement as attempts to abolish or block attempts to create Black Students' Officers and other liberation positions, and can help in the campaign to ensure legislation against racism in education is strengthened and not undermined.

Save English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

As SAAR went to press, efforts were gearing up for the Save ESOL day of action on the 19 September, aimed at kicking off a second year of campaigning.

The Government announced last year that it would be restricting access for those who benefit from English for Speakers of Other Languages training, provoking widespread opposition from trade unions, NUS and refugee, migrant and Black community organisations. ESOL is a vital service for allowing those who wish to better their English language skills, including young asylum seekers and international students, to participate more fully in society.

The University and College Union (UCU) believe the minimum cost for a course will be £426 – out of the reach of most migrants and those in settled communities. There are no obligations for employers to help.

The UCU has launched a widely-backed campaign to Save ESOL. In May, Mayor of London Ken Livingstone announced that he was alleviating the immediate effects of the cuts by allocating £15 million for ESOL provision for Londoners.

You can help by working with your local UCU branch to collect signatures for the Save ESOL petition, and by passing policy in your Union to support the campaign.

• For more information visit www.ucu.org.uk

Join the Student Assembly Against Racism

Affiliation fees: £3 (individual student); £10 (student society/SAAR group); £20 (student union); £35 (NUS Areas).

Name.....

Address Phone

E-mail

Club/Society/Organisation Position (if any)

I/we enclose £..... affiliation fee, plus £..... donation.

Cheques payable to SAAR. Return to SAAR, c/o NAAR, 28 Commercial Street, London E1 6LS

Support an inquest for Jay

Jay Abatan was brutally attacked in a racist frenzy by a gang in Brighton on 24 January 1999. He died five days later. Jay's attackers have never been convicted of murder.



Eight and a half years on, Jay's brother Michael and his family are still bravely fighting for justice for Jay and need your support.

The family have succeeded in forcing the police to admit serious flaws in their investigation and to take disciplinary action against officers. Incredibly, no incident room was set up after the attack to investigate the case and officers gave good character evidence for the accused in court. The family are now campaigning for an inquest into Jay's death to find out exactly what happened.

You can help by signing the online petition to the coroner of Brighton and Hove, urging a reinstatement of an inquest for Jay. Please visit www.justiceforjay.co.uk.