

Britain's new racism

1. There has been a dangerous upsurge in racism in Britain in approximately the last decade, most recently compounded by the Woolwich killing. This has included a rise in racist attacks on the Muslim community, the rise (and subsequent fall) of the English Defence League, the recent electoral breakthrough of UKIP, and a secular increase in the everyday, pernicious racism of name calling and street abuse that blights the daily lives of racially oppressed groups, despite all the progress that has been won through struggle over the last decades. This is all the more worrying given the longer-term trend towards a rise in fascist sentiment and support for xenophobic parties across Europe. The British state has played a decisive role in the articulation of new forms of racism in Britain, whether with respect to immigration, or the disciplining of Muslim populations under the rubric of 'British values', 'British jobs for British workers', or Cameron's 'muscular liberalism'. The mainstream parties, working through the state, have both entrenched repressive policies such as greater surveillance and policing of Muslims, harsher controls of asylum and immigration and hard racialised crackdowns in the wake of the England riots, and simultaneously promoted the idea that racial minorities either represent a security threat, or are failing to 'integrate' into 'Britishness'. This has made life harder for those oppressed by racism, but it has also contributed to the danger represented by the far right, by validating their narratives and policy talking points. As austerity bites, hitting the racially oppressed much harder than others, the idea that the poorest and most oppressed only have themselves to blame for their situation is gaining currency, adding to the acceptability of racism.
2. Anti-migrant stances pervade our media and culture. In 2014 migrants and refugees are facing a sustained offensive against them, which began under the last Labour government but has further intensified with the Tory-led coalition. There is a campaign of vilification by politicians across the mainstream, which has fuelled the rise of the racist right, intersecting with right-wing media scare stories about Romanians and Bulgarians "flooding into Britain". There is a campaign against their ability to live in the UK removing or restricting rights to benefits, housing, health, work, and legal representation. An ever-widening number of professionals and landlords are expected to act as "immigration spies", legally obliged to check the immigration status of their clients. There are also moves to set caps on non-EU immigration and talk by the government of re-negotiating Britain's relationship

with Europe to bring an end to the freedom of movement. Many of these measures are contained in the proposed Immigration Bill and some proposals are even being rushed in ahead of the Bill becoming law. Raids on migrants at home, in places of employment, cafes, social events continue and are being carried out more publicly, sometimes with imbedded media coverage, in order to spread fear into migrant communities. These measures have are not only racist, but have a clear class significance. They constitute an attack on the free movement of labour, in an era when the mobility of capital is actively championed. They also, as we have seen with the 3cosas campaign by migrant cleaners in Senate House, work to divide labour, weaken its bargaining power and reduce its cost to employers.

3. Racism against Muslims has deep roots in British history, extending into the colonial era. Its most recent manifestations can be traced to the period after the 'Rushdie affair' when Muslims were increasingly identified as a 'security' problem, and a menace to national 'values'. Following the riots in northern cities, the government extended this attack to British Asians in general, alleging that they were 'self-segregating'. In the context of the 'war on terror', these discourses about British Asians were focused on Muslims in particular, and a neo-Powellite argument took hold that 'multiculturalism' had failed. Politicians and media outlets claimed that by allowing diverse 'cultures' to 'do their own thing', Britain had tolerated islands of extremism in its midst. This counterinsurgency narrative validated a series of high profile attacks on the rights of Muslims, such as the Forest Gate raids in 2006 or the long-term imprisonment without charge and subsequent deportation of Babar Ahmad and Talha Ahsan - only the most severe examples of the day-to-day state repression and racism experienced by the Muslim community. The language of this 'new racism' blames racially oppressed groups themselves for failing to 'integrate' or 'confront extremism'. In so doing, it both validates racist repression and simultaneously instils fear and discourages resistance to racism. The fact that it is culture and creed, rather than colour and breed, which is the ideological focus of these measures allows politicians to pretend that they are not racist. Yet, there is a long history of 'cultural racism', which has become especially dominant in the aftermath of Britain's colonial era. Even the most biologicistic forms of racism have always been supplemented by essentialising cultural stereotypes. The representation of Muslims as a monolithic bloc embodying the most hateful characteristics belongs to this tradition.
4. Racism, national chauvinism and imperialism have been tied to capitalism from its beginning. The slave trade and the colonization of India went hand in hand with the

industrial revolution and were justified through racism and national chauvinism. The struggles against imperialism and the struggles against racism in the countries of the core have inspired and stood in solidarity with one and other; the slogans of the American civil rights movement were used in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Ireland. It is imperialist aggression, the hardships of capitalism in the 'periphery', and nature of the global division of labour that has driven immigration to the 'core' countries in the West. We recognise that we cannot fight racism without fighting imperialism, and we cannot fight imperialism without fighting racism.

5. In electoral politics, the most immediate threat is represented by UKIP, particularly as it gears up for the local authority elections in May. UKIP is an unstable alliance of traditional Conservative supporters, reactionary malcontents and the far right. Its racism emanates logically from its commitment to a 'Britishness' which is both xenophobic, and authoritarian. Defending Britain from the EU, as they see it, also means heavily controlled borders and a well-policed interior with racial minorities kept in their place. This is linked to the insecurity experienced by sections of the middle and working classes arising from the global economic downturn, and the desire to control its effects by disciplining the poor and fortifying the sovereignty and authority of the state. One of the major strategic objectives of UKIP is to shift parliamentary politics, and the wider media discourse, to the right. In this endeavour, it has had some success, as the Tory Right has felt emboldened to pressure Cameron on immigration while Farage's omnipresence in the media has given the party's talking points some public legitimacy. Neither of the mainstream parties can effectively act as a counterpoint to UKIP because they share certain fundamental assumptions with UKIP and have themselves been staking out a share of the same racist terrain.

Left Unity's anti-racist agenda

6. Left Unity entirely rejects all of the "received wisdoms" of the new racism about Muslims, ethnic minorities, migrants and migrants that have increasingly become socially acceptable. We also recognise that the fight against racism cannot be reduced to the anti-fascist struggle. The comforting fiction that 'we are all anti-racist except the fascists' leaves the mainstream infrastructure of racism upon which the far right thrives unchallenged. The everyday racism of the media and major parties provides legitimacy for the violent actions of groups like the EDL and BNP. A new anti-racist politics is therefore urgently needed. It is this common sense A new party of the left worthy of the name must go on a *general offensive* against racism, allying with the social forces already engaged in

that work, particularly the racially oppressed and migrant groups.

7. We recognise in particular the importance of developing policies that are based on: (a) policies which attack the systematic and structural disadvantages and discrimination faced by racially oppressed groups; (b) opposition to all attempts to curtail or restrict the freedom of movement in Europe, and complete opposition to all immigration controls as divisive, racist, and anti-working class; (c) self-organisation – in line with Left Unity’s commitment to liberation politics, we support the principle of self-organisation, and believe black leadership of the movement is key to defeating racism.

8. Widespread racism about migrants does not simply arise on the basis of myths and falsehoods, but it is particularly effective when such falsehoods can be insinuated into the daily experiences and existing ideology of ordinary people. In order to challenge anti-migrant racism, therefore, it will be necessary to challenge myths with facts and alternative arguments. However, that will not be sufficient – we also need to present a positive agenda on immigration, linked to a wider anti-racist politics. Left Unity believes that immigration controls are inherently unjust and racist. They are part of the global management of labour along racist lines which inevitably brutalise the poorest workers while in fact weakening the collective interests and bargaining power of workers. As such, we are opposed to immigration control, as we are opposed to any laws which make people illegal because of who they are, where they or their parents were born, the colour of their skin, or what language they speak. And we insist that it is in the interests of the working class as a whole, migrant and non-migrant, in Britain and internationally, to have equal rights to move across borders, to settle in other countries, and to bring their families with them if they choose to do so. Insofar as these rights exist, however imperfectly, in the EU states as a result of binding international agreements, we defend them trenchantly and without equivocation.

9. Structural oppression is felt differently by intersecting groups, so women in BME communities face increased sexism as a result of racist policies. This means our policy in Left Unity should recognise the particular affect policies targeting refugees have had on women. We should support a new generation of grassroots campaigns by forging links with black led organisations, such as Women for Women Refugees, who are fighting to put an end to the detention of women and girls. The majority of women claiming asylum are survivors of sexual violence. Women in BME communities experience racism and sexism, so we need to fight to defend specialist services offering support for survivors of sexual

violence. We recognise that women are the primary carers of children, and we must fight to put an end to policy that does not take account of where women have networks and have established themselves in communities, when granting refugee and discretionary leave status to women. Women claiming asylum must not be separated from their friends and their communities. However, whilst we fight to ensure women have the support of their own networks, in terms of looking after children, we must also insist on childcare provision at every level of organisation within Left Unity.

10. For all the negatives in the British situation, there are grounds for optimism. Popular views on immigration and race are actually far more complex and ambivalent than opinion polls would suggest. The ambiguities of popular opinion are, moreover, not a concluded fact but raw material which can be worked with by those seeking to draw out the best instinctive responses of ordinary people. Anti-racism actually forms part of the common sense of millions of working class people who, thanks to decades of large-scale immigration, experience a 'lived multicultural' that is remote from the stereotypes of 'failed multiculturalism'. A left political articulation that operates on such lived experience, linking a popular anti-racist politics to a wider critique of class injustice, can begin to shift the balance, and offer a counterpoint to the racist Right which the mainstream parties cannot.

11. In this situation Left Unity is presented with important duties.

- a. Left Unity commits itself to working with the new generation of grassroots campaigns from these communities. Black led organisations like women for women refugees, agitation like that against police brutality and racist prison practices, community self defence initiatives like those against fascists and chauvanists, should be supported. Left Unity should be a natural home for the people active in these. A black led group of memebrrs should be elected to bridge the gap between left unity and thse campaigns. Left Unity is committed to supportinf the black and oppressed led campaign against racim and chauvinism.
- b. Anti-cuts activism. The major political battles in Britain in the coming years will be about the brutal paring down of public service and welfare, and the redistribution of resources to the rich. Whether it affects housing, healthcare, labour rights or municipal services, this will harm women and the racially oppressed more, and the accompanying ideological headwinds will make solidarity between those suffering its effects more difficult to achieve. Not only that, but the beneficiaries of austerity, primarily the capitalist class and its

political allies, will tend to defend their gains by arguing that the real threat to services comes from 'foreigners' taking over the resources of 'indigenous people'. Any anti-austerity movement with any chance of success must therefore be persuaded to foreground the issue of anti-racism, to argue that working class people, of whatever background, are indeed all in it together and have a shared interest in defeating the racists.

- C. Union campaigns. Trade unions are essential to any effective movement against racism. This is because of their ability to unite workers in their shared interests, regardless of background, because they can offer protection and solidarity to the most vulnerable workers who often happen to be migrant workers, and because they are part of a wider labour movement that takes an interest in opposing racism. Left Unity should support and participate in the Unite-sponsored march against racism, but also build support within unions for migrant workers' struggles such as the 3cosas campaign.
- d. Support campaign(s) to stop the Immigration Bill.
- e. Elections. Where Left Unity chooses to stand, it must be a strong pro-migrant voice. Candidates must make it a priority to challenge the reactionary line that is coming from the other parties, to articulate the principled anti-racist line that most other parties cannot or will not. Where we don't stand candidates, we can and should produce pro-migrant materials and distribute these, taking our arguments to hustings and local newspapers.
- f. Defiance not Compliance. The government proposals and existing controls can only work if professionals comply with them. Already we have seen the opposition by health professionals to it is being proposed. Left Unity needs to campaign for the trade unions not only to oppose these proposals but support workers in refusing to carry them out.
- g. No to privatisation. The Government is outsourcing immigration controls to organisations such as G4S who have an appalling track record on human rights including the death of Jimmy Mubenga who they were trying to deport. However, this does not mean that these things should be "in house". We are opposed to the whole immigration "service". The state should not be able to absolve themselves of their dirty work by handing over the provision of racist controls to the private sector.
- h. Racists view on the left. Left Unity must challenge racist ideas in the labour movement, and even sections of the socialist movement. Some openly support

or implicitly endorse the idea of “British Jobs for British Workers” – the supposed need for greater and “tougher” immigration controls to defend worker's rights. Left Unity must contest this wherever it appears.