

RED ACTION

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Mori Poll Shock

**The left is not winning
the arguments...**

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ers are
welcome here

Don't let
the racists
divide us

Demonstrate

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March to Wood Green library (Barbara
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EDITORIAL

Brutal candour has been a feature of Red

Action analysis from the very outset. Subject matter apart, it is usually the no prisoner conclusions that cause so many on the left to recoil. Of late, a number of organisations have opened up public discussions on where the fault line in Marxist thinking lies. 'There is a break somewhere and I am not clear where. All of us would say - Marx, Engels, Lenin. Then what?'

As Red Action instigated a search for 'the break' over a decade ago, when the entire left united in denying there was a problem, any thawing in dogma is welcome.

That is not to say that qualifications with regard to the efforts of this batch of pioneers is unwarranted. For as is openly stated the latest 'search' is to be conducted within firmly proscribed boundaries. Thereby insuring that the investigation will not reach politically unpalatable conclusions. A conclusion that undermined their own reason for being would never do.

Unburdened by such ideological baggage, and with absolutely no concern for the maintaining of reputations, the Red Action approach was entirely objective. After much discussion, much of it conducted in public, it concluded the decisive theoretical 'break' had taken 'concrete' form in Russia as early as 1918. This was a date that thoroughly implicated Trotsky, but also placed Lenin, an even bigger Bolshevik icon, firmly in the frame. Indeed as was made clear, the 'break' did not happen after Lenin - it began with him.

What if Marx had mumbled something about 'internationalism', and instructed them, as the LSA recomend, 'to move fast with cards and a welcome party' instead?

As far as Red Action were concerned the choice thereafter was between the methods of Marx or Lenin. Outraged at such revisionism various groups, otherwise bitter rivals found common cause. *Workers Power, The Leninist, Open Polemic* among others, rushed to the defence of their idol, all visibly eager to claim a renegade scalp. Too eager as it turned out.

To their chagrin, Red Action they found, were well dug in. Confronted with an analysis, firmly grounded in historical and theoretical fact, it was all too clearly they, and not Red Action, who had not done their homework. Horribly embar-

assed they retreated with indecent haste. Possibly, some face-saving agreement was reached between them, for all of a sudden the matter was dropped.

Now brutal candour is again on the agenda, and again brickbats abound. As before in an effort to disavow logic there has been a concerted effort to demonise Red Action instead.

But with no evidence of Red Action wilting, the knockout-blow has, (unwisely as it turns out), been sought in the writings of Marx himself. Reminiscent of the debate of a decade ago generalities have since been flourished, with uncertain authority, by it must be admitted, (if lack of integrity is any consideration) some of the least serious protagonists.

For some time Red Action has been warning that the alarming growth of the Right in Europe is not attributable purely to their own efforts. On the contrary the fault lies with a multicultural ideology which has successfully supplanted 'class' in favour of 'ethnic minority' in the public mind. This has created the basis for the right to 'return the serve' by successful campaigning for privileges for an 'ethnic majority'.

It is imperative, Red Action has been arguing, for the Left to step outside the limits of this 'minority versus majority' logic, and set about reclaiming the initiative by displacing race with class, and thus shifting the burden of justification back on to the other side.

From a progressive perspective hard to argue with, you might have thought? But far from it. As if the political or social consequence were of no mind, 'opposition to all immigration controls' is to continue to be championed 'as a bed-rock of Socialist Alliance policy' we are told, on the basis that 'where capital enjoys unrestricted freedom of movement it seems inescapable that labour must demand the same freedom'. Who this freedom is to be demanded of is not made clear? From capital? Which has just won for itself unrestricted freedom?

Further disregarding the current balance of forces, 'economic migration' is in future to be championed as 'a human right', while the 'welcoming' of infinite numbers of 'immigrants' regardless of political or social repercussions is hailed as 'a communist principle.'

Is it not odd that the upholding of a principle of communism is directly responsible for the rebirth of its political opposite? Or that Marx, who knew a thing or two, seems never to have heard of it? In fact, he was it appears, distinctly less evangelical on the subject of 'economic migration' than those who would claim to be his followers.

In 1866 for instance, he reported on the attempts to bring down wages in the tailoring industry in Scotland through the recruitment by master tailors, mostly 'big capitalists,' of migrant labour from Germany. Writing on behalf of the Central Council of the International Working Men's Association, Marx said:

"The purpose of this importation is the same as that of the importation of Indian coolies to Jamaica, namely the perpetuation of slavery. If the masters succeeded through the import of German labour, in nullifying the concessions they had already made, it would inevitably lead to repercussions in England."

"No one would suffer more than the German Workers themselves, who constitute in Great Britain a larger number than the workers of all the other Continental nations. And the newly-imported workers being completely helpless in a strange land would soon sink to the level of pariah's. Furthermore it is a point of honour with the German workers to prove to other countries that they like their brothers in France, Belgium and Switzerland know how to defend common interests of the class and will not become obedient mercenaries of capital in its struggle against labour."

The efforts of the International in warning the Germans against migrating under such conditions was as Marx recorded "a great success". A success not only in it's own right, but with the practical benefits of the International on display, the English sections rushed to affiliate. What would have been the consequences for the Scottish, German and English workers, and the International itself had Marx, in response to a call for advice and support, mumbled something from the Manifesto about 'internationalism', and instructed them, as the LSA recommend "to move fast with cards and a welcome party" instead?

Currently, Labour is thinking about scrapping the 1971 Immigration Act in order to recruit skilled workers from India. The motivation is undoubtedly to drive down wages and conditions in the burgeoning computer industry. As things stand, even if the Left had leverage in India, it would not be exercised. As far as it goes all 'obedient mercenaries of capital' are deemed welcome. It is afterall their human right.

As the whole thing is a mess, it is entirely consistent Red Action and fellow travellers should be too deemed 'pariah' for saying so. But as hinted at, the current controversy and the previous debate are not unrelated. Back then, a staunch Leninist in danger of partially succumbing to the Red Action logic on some point or other, was publicly rebuked by a colleague who outlined his priorities as follows: "Of course, you realise comrade, that if Red Action are right, then we are wrong." This time the equation is even more straightforward. Indeed it is perfectly simple. 'Either we are right or the BNP are'. Your call 'comrades' •

BACK ISSUES

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THE BIG ISSUE

THE SECOND I heard someone had been killed in 'cross-fire' I knew it meant someone had just been murdered in broad daylight. 'Crossfire' is one military euphemism for cold-blooded murder, 'ricochet' is another.

I was present at a Republican 'riot' in west Belfast when Sean Downes was killed by just such a 'ricochet'. The plastic bullet that killed him, was fired point blank into his chest by an RUC man from a distance of six feet. Within hours the media were happily regurgitating that 'ricochet story', giving short shrift in the process to 'Republican allegations'. Nothing more might have come of it were it not for footage shot by a Canadian camera team being released. Similarly with the 12-year-old Palestinian deliberately targeted by Israeli security forces. There too, cold-blooded murder was captured on film. In the same way too, when the two undercover Israeli soldiers were captured by Palestinians and killed on camera, it drew instant reminders of the killing of the two British soldiers by Republicans after they too took a 'wrong turning'. Indeed as one commentator remarked, the public explanation by the Israeli and British authorities as to how they came to be in the vicinity at all, were 'practically identical'.

In much the same way as Republicans believed the undercover unit were SAS and up to no good, the Palestinians were insistent that the Israelis were also specially trained undercover assassins. By the time the counter-spin of the authorities had been given a good airing, far from being assassins, the victims had been reduced to pacifistic non-combatants, who with hindsight, ought not really have been allowed out on their own. How the Israelis could 'stumble' through so many of their own road blocks, or how the Brits could possibly have been unaware of a high profile IRA funeral, the subject of international media coverage, remains a mystery. Just how mysterious largely depends on how you view the respective national liberation struggles.

On that score, to say opinion is divided is an understatement. For those like Danny Morrison, who see the Palestinian cause through the prism of Irish Republicanism, partisanship comes easy. "For this past two weeks I have watched the news about the Middle East on television but even in middle age I want to kill Israeli soldiers. Are they not the biggest cowards in the world? They shot dead a kid with his schoolbag on his back..." Opposite is the view presented by the *Jerusalem Post* who opined that, "The gruesome televised pictures of the deaths of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy and an ambulance driver who tried to save him indicate the depths to which the Palestinian use of violence for political gain will sink."

As if in rejoinder, Morrison counters "Don't get me wrong. The IRA have killed people. Have killed men, women and children. Caused grief. We caused grief and pain and unlimited pain. But we were held to account by our consciences, our community, and by a thing called humanity... These restraints and considerations are completely

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FRONT COVER:
A Mori poll published on October 23 found that of those questioned 80% rejected core anti-racist arguments. Over recent months Red Action have attempted to raise the dangers on internet discussion sites, public forums, letters pages and within the LSA; to no avail. The left are not winning - do the left care?

(see pages 6, 7, 8, 11, 12)

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THE BIG ISSUE - continued

missing from the conceited and arrogant Israelis, whose conceitedness and arrogance is only made possible because the USA finance the bridgehead in the Middle East and intimidate us with the Holocaust to try and make us feel guilty."

In war as in politics, perception is everything. So in the midst of the slaughter, victimhood is the most sought after of prizes. Which is why with a killing ratio of over 20-1, Israeli propaganda began to refer to its enemies not as Palestinians but as 'Arabs'. As the Palestinians are few and without a pot to piss in, and the Arabs deemed numerous and rich, the Israeli state with the fourth largest standing army in the world, saw advantage in inverting the David and Goliath nature of the contest. Proving that while aggression is prized in military terms, it is largely frowned upon diplomatically. And so, if it is only the enemy that is dying, it is only because like the IRA hunger strikers they are 'fanatics', or because like the Palestinians they "actively invite casualties".

Alex Brummer, City Editor of the *Daily Mail*, expanded on that point when he asked: "what kind of people is it that sends out its young people with stones, bottles and whatever weapons can be mustered against a modern army? This is the behaviour of those who would sacrifice their children for hollow propaganda." Then again what kind of people is it that sends out a modern army that responds to stones with bullets, and to bullets with artillery, and happily sacrifices other people's children for hollow propaganda? People who would buy a paper like the *Jerusalem Post* which recently ran a feature on child victims with the imperishable headline: "Child sacrifice is Palestinian Paganism", presumably.

With one propaganda flourish worthy of Goebbels, the Palestinian is depicted not only as aggressor but as Anti-Christ. Anti-Christ is also how the Pope is depicted by Protestant fundamentalism too. Arrogance and conceitedness are also features of Unionism. Or were. For unlike Israel who are sure of the continued backing of their US sponsor, Unionism has grave doubts about the fealty of Britain and so are as divided on strategy, as the cocksure Israelis are united. Until America stops believing that what happens in Israel influences the domestic policies of the United States, Israel will never feel compelled to act with 'restraint', to act like a democracy. Until that happens Israel will, as the *Sun* reminded us, remain 'our friend'. US policy may of course some day change, but if it does 'conscience and humanity' will have nothing to do with it •

BACK ISSUES

RED ACTION SUPPORT INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES

Red Action stands for the political independence of the working class - pure and simple. The May election provided us with an opportunity to implement this strategy in practice. In Edinburgh we campaigned for the James Connolly Society candidate standing against the local Labour leader in Connolly's old ward. In north London we supported the independent candidate George Silcott, brother of jailed Winston.

Red Action's intervention on the Isle of Dogs meant that, for the first time there, a resolute anti-fascist message was combined with a radical proposal i.e. that faced with the prospect of either the ultra conservative BNP, or a return to the old bullshit, the local people should elect their own recallable delegates. Armed with the power of de-selection a form of guerrilla warfare against the bureaucracy could be mounted and continued indefinitely until resources or progress are secured. In a battlefield position, while the Trotskyite Left without exception line up with the bureaucracy in defence of the status quo, we stand with the working class against the bureaucracy, and within the working class; with the anti-racists against the racists.

Support for independent working class candidates is an interim step in pursuit of the goal of the independent working class party. After a century of treachery, fudge and failure the wheel has come full circle and for Labour and the middle class Left, the party is indeed finally over.

Red Action, issue 68, Summer 1994

“At least we didn’t get the racist vote”

On October 12, the London Socialist Alliance contested a by-election in Hackneys’ Wick ward. John Byrne looks at the result and what it means for the future prospects of the LSA in this east London borough.



LSA candidate, Diana Swingler

The 2% of those eligible to vote who backed the LSA in October’s Hackney Wick Council by-election have, according to the LSA, made them the “third biggest party in Hackney.” This comes something of a surprise, not only to the IWCA, who have an eighteen month head start of working in the area, but also undoubtedly to the Tories, who were under the impression, that with nine councillors, they were the third biggest party!

Equally the Greens, with two councillors, had thought that they were fourth, but have seemingly been overtaken by the 171 votes the LSA have amassed so far in Hackney.

If we go back 18 months we can look to at the progress the LSA has made. Standing as “Socialist Unity” but including all the major players in the LSA plus the SLP, their candidate gained 37 votes with a leaflet that had a dense block of text calling for “the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords,” and stating that “the peoples of Scotland and Wales must have self-determination.” They felt that they needed to qualify this last point, by stating “We need the voluntary unity of the working people of England, Scotland and Wales against our common enemies.” In case anyone was unsure, the international section of their leaflet stated “Saddam and his like are no friends of working people.” And about the council by-election there was very little.

Compared with this effort. The LSA has clearly made progress. Their leaflets in the recent by-election avoided the worst excesses of Leftie language, kept mainly to the issues relevant to a council by-election, and brought up class as an issue more regularly than socialism. They used bullet points to call for things like “affordable homes for working class people - not luxury developments for the few.” As a direct result of this improvement, they trebled their vote from 37 to 134, even though it was a bigger ward.

In addition, the LSA held a stall every Saturday on a pitch in the ward that was abandoned by the SWP two years ago. They were seen to have fought a good campaign on the doorsteps, but in fact only ran the kind of campaign that Labour ran in the ward up until the early 90’s. They put out two leaflets and claim to have carried out a 100% canvas, but this probably only means knocking on every door once.

A week before the by-election the LSA held a public meeting. The meeting was chaired by an SWP member and with the candidate and main speaker Mark Steel both being SWP, along with most of the contributors from the floor, it was obvious who was calling the shots in the LSA. Mark Steel spelled out who had suffered under three years of New Labour: “teachers, asylum seekers and students.” The candidate, Diana Swingler, spent five minutes on the subject of pensions, but chose to concentrate not on the effect of poverty on local pensioners and on the pensioners’ campaigns, but on how it was “splitting the Labour Party apart.” The tone of those invited to speak from the floor was set by one SWP member who described the LSA candidate as being “a tribune for the oppressed.”

Whilst the LSA claims publicly that their stance on asylum seekers is a “vote winner” they are not quite so sure about it privately. In fact a briefing paper given out to canvassers stated that their support for asylum seekers was unpopular and suggesting ways around this. A reality underlined through the problems being experienced by the Lib Dems, who were standing the only

black candidate. The response of the LSA candidate to this, was that as they had put support for asylum seekers on all their leaflets “at least we won’t get the racist vote” (the failure of the racist vote to turnout certainly cost the Lib Dem’s the seat they had taken from Labour with a 500 strong margin last time!). So while the LSA is happy to chase the Green vote, the ‘racist’ element in the working class is written off and left for the Lib Dems or the BNP to pick up. Isn’t the whole idea of the LSA contesting elections to get the ‘racist vote’ to think in terms of class instead?

As bad as the confusion, the LSA’s campaign was dishonest from start to finish. Not minor things like claiming their candidate was a “local resident” when she doesn’t live in the ward, but writing a leaflet before the campaign began which stated the “campaign has already attracted enthusiastic support from local nurses, firefighters and council tenants.” Despite the fact that the majority of council flats in the Ward have already been sold-off, Mike Marqusee’s article in *Weekly Worker* (14.9.00) stated that “local council tenants” would speak at the LSA public meeting. Of course this didn’t happen and was never going to.

Mike Marqusee also claimed that “we’re the only party saying scrap the ITNet (private housing benefit contractor) contract now” but the LSA weren’t embarrassed when the ruling Labour/Tory alliance voted to do exactly that. In fact the LSA then claimed ‘it was them that won it!’ Ignoring the broad based campaign made up of council tenants and advice centres, in which the IWCA was the only political player, an LSA press release stated “they have sacked ITNet because of mass anger on the doorsteps of Hackney Wick and growing support for the LSA.”

In gaining 134 votes the LSA avoided humiliation, but the real issue is the 81.6% of potential voters who did not vote at all. The LSA did not cover this in their analysis. Of the result “an elated Diana Swingler”, the LSA candidate, said, “our vote is a positive vote for socialist politics.” Presumably the other 98% were not so positive about socialism.

If the result of the by-election were such a success, surely the LSA would want to build on it. However on the Saturday following the by-election the stall was back up in the same place, but was now fatally selling *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Review* instead. At least some of the 134 voters who backed them would have felt conned. Rather than trying to build the LSA by showing that they would carry on with community politics after the election, the SWP instinct is to mop up any support for themselves.

The LSA improved on the “Socialist Unity” result only because they fought a better campaign and managed to focus on some local issues. In other words only because they changed. If progress is to continue, if the vainglorious boast of being Hackney’s “third biggest party” is ever to be realised, the scale of change will need to be root and branch, and not just electorally •

Red Action have long pointed to the existence of a 'reactionary reservoir'. 'Critical mass' is the term the BNP prefer. Now even as *Searchlight* concede to the reality, the revolutionary Left remain firmly in denial. This is what specialists refer to as...

'The elephant in the sitting room syndrome'

A. Shaw examines the implications

Working backward, a staggering "eight out of ten people in Britain" are of the opinion that "immigrants are a drain on national resources." The *Readers Digest* Mori poll published on October 23 came a little over a week after the Runnymede Trust concluded that the term 'Britain has racial connotations', and ought in the interests of race relations be banned.

On September 3 the *Observer* ran a front page headline which proclaimed that "Whites will be an ethnic minority by the end of the century". Lee Jasper, an adviser to Ken Livingstone, went one further boasting that whites would be a minority in the capital "within the decade". A few reasons why, in responding to a critic on the Red Action internet discussion site recently, a BNP member could correctly remark: "We're obsessed with race? Race is everywhere". Race is indeed everywhere and it is clearly not the far-right, at whom the finger of blame ought be pointed. They are on the contrary, merely one imagines, the suitably grateful beneficiaries. Evidently delighted with the controversial Runnymede Trust recommendation, the BNP are considering a new recruitment leaflet based on it. All told, the combination of the *Readers Digest* poll findings and the 'Britain to be banned!' headline-grabber, suggests that the high water mark of political correctness over race may be near to being reached.

If so, the political fall-out will not be far behind. For persistently flagging such dangers, Red Action has been accused among many worse things, of being 'apocalyptic' on the issue. One inference being that at best, the repeated warnings are misplaced or wrong headed. At worst, that we are somehow motivated by racism ourselves. It is a sign of the deep confusion that someone can be simultaneously accused of crying wolf, and being one. But confusion is not the only, or indeed even dominant ingredient in the unfolding controversy.

Stupidity, cowardice, and hypocrisy all feature heavily in the unedifying mix. Examples abound. Back in July we had Red Action denounced as 'racist' 'chauvinist' and even 'national socialist' for pointing to evidence suggesting 'Refugees Welcome Here' posters in impoverished working class areas, were ill-conceived, and thus self-defeating.

On August 9, a senior Red Action member took up the challenge of addressing a seminar organised by the Communist Party of Great Britain under the banner 'Official anti-racism and the white working class'. "Controversial for some" is the only response to the 6,000 word speech to be found in *Weekly Worker* up to now.

Next, when on September 5 the lone Red Action delegate to the LSA steering committee called for a 'review' of current LSA strategies on race and immigration, it was dismissed after a 20 minute discussion. A rejection seemingly sugar-coated, by the unanimous acceptance of the CPGB recommendation that the LSA should instead "sponsor" a public debate called by AFA, and entitled: 'Can the Left beat the BNP?' Not only sponsor, but as

the LSA minutes show fully "participate in" the public forum provided.

In the interim, a leading and nominally independent member of the LSA Mike Marqusee, who had vociferously denied the need for any 'review' in the meeting on September 5, then wrote a lengthy letter, printed in *Weekly Worker* the following week, outlining where and why, the existing strategies might indeed be in need of 'fine-tuning'. A U-turn all the more startling as he liberated key sections from a Red Action document in order to support 'his' case! A plagiarism compounded by members of the CPGB dominating the letters pages of their own paper with bizarre extrapolations based on comments from individual Red Action contributors, up to the point of dissecting single words for hidden racial meaning, all the while brazenly blanking the comprehensive nature of the discourse of August 9.

It is instructive that where fascism plays the race card to provoke debate,

supporters of multiculturalism wield it more often to abort debate. Or as another dissident put it: "the fascist cynically exploits legitimate concerns of ordinary people for the propagation of his ideology. The liberal anti-fascist cynically exploits popular disgust at reactionary ideology so as to propagate his own fake 'progressive' ideology."

Taking into account the preliminaries, it was not too surprising, that when the AFA meeting on October 1 rolled up, all 37 representatives of the LSA steering committee, and their organisations, (bar two delegates from the CPGB) had discovered more pressing engagements.

When the question "Is society moving to the right or the left?" was posed to the remainder of the panel, now comprising the CPGB, Red Action and Class War, all were agreed the direction was comprehensively and undeniably rightward. As intended, the counter argument was to have been put by the SWP. For not only is SWP policy predicated on the view that the drift is to the left, it is moreover the SWP which is undeniably the dominant current, ideologically and numerically, not only within the London Socialist

the government's record was one of "terrorists released, rioters allowed to roam the streets wreaking havoc and destruction whilst the authorities look on"
Sam Butler, Chair, Countryside Alliance

Alliance, but within similar formations across the country. It is this influence aligned to a neurotic need to sedate their own membership: 'the Nazis are tiny...' it is a good time to be a socialist', which causes those even partially aware, to underestimate the scale, depth and speed of the rightward drive, and disables the SWP leadership from even discussing it in public.

Searchlight by contrast, previously wool-pulling co-conspirators of the SWP (even to the point of fiddling election statistics in order to try and prove the far-Right on a continuing downward spiral), seem to have been sniffing the wind, for in the October editorial they perform a quite shameless volte face. "*Searchlight*" we are now informed, "have long argued that beyond the fascists there is a layer of society that believes multiracial, democratic and now Labour Britain, has upset the natural order of things... These forces extend far beyond the activities and influence of fascist groups and are at the very heart of English Nationalism."

Correctly listed among the 'forces of reaction' are 'farmers, self-employed truck drivers, opponents of the abolition of the House of Lords, the pound, to fox hunting and rural life': in essence the "fascists target constituency".

Of course, for things to take a decisive turn for the worse, it is not as *Searchlight* seem to be still arguing, for these forces to coalesce underneath a BNP, or at this stage even under an ultra-nationalist umbrella first. Which is another irony. For as BNP prospects are brightened immeasurably by the fuel protest/refugee controversy, the strategy of demonising and criminalising the far-right: 'fascism is not an opinion it is a crime', recommended with shrill insistence to the authorities, by liberal anti-fascism both here and in Europe is draining of credibility just as fast.

Mainly because, as Red Action have long argued, the far-Right are not the cause, but are both a symptom and of course beneficiary of the Left's enthusiastic support for the racialising of every possible equation. As the political vanguard of the Right, their fortunes bear watching, if only as an indication of which way the wind is blowing. For as the BNP themselves correctly point out, the fuel protests are as much to do with an attack on 'political correctness' as on tax.

And in the same way the BNP chose from an early stage to identify with the Countryside Alliance, the leadership of the Alliance seem equally determined to meet them, at least half way, ideologically. "The Alliance's fight to save hunting is no longer being waged with vaguely rational arguments. Enter it's collective mind and you are in a war of national liberation against an alien and depraved dictatorship", wrote Nick Cohen in the *Observer* on October 15. He also quoted from the magazine *Earth Dog Running Dog* which carries the Countryside Alliance's logo. The disgust with what it considers effete liberalism, is both explicit and comprehensive. Within, are references to the "gay plague", Oona King MP for Bethnal Green in east London is referred to as "typical of her species", and her working class constituents described as "scroungers" and "dead-beats". To complete the full set, Sam Butler, chairman of the Alliance, told the troops assembled outside the Labour party conference that the government's record was one of "terrorists released, rioters allowed to roam the streets, wreaking havoc and destruction whilst the authorities look on". Thus far "we have been resolute in our determination to conduct our protests within the law. However should Parliament act perversely on the issue of personal freedom, then it will only have itself to blame for what may follow" (*Observer*, 15.10.00).

Considering they are promising a 600,000-strong march on London, and do not conceal their admiration for those who have brought the country to a halt, and threaten to do so again, this is no idle threat. Indeed the political menace is graphically spelt out. Not the most auspicious occasion then, one might have thought to produce a report which was



Correctly listed among the 'forces of reaction' are farmers, self-employed truck drivers, opponents of the abolition of the House of Lords, the pound, to fox hunting and rural life; in essence the "fascists target constituency".

announced in screaming headlines that henceforth the term 'Britain was to be deemed racist' and would therefore be 'consigned to the dustbin of history'.

Yet even worse than the timing, is the vacuous thinking behind it. In attacking the recommendations, *Observer* columnist Ros Coward bravely pulled no punches. "The Runnymede Trust's suggestion that 'Britishness' connotes racism" she wrote "is absurd, an attempt to wring a mea culpa from guilty liberals and nothing to do with racial unity and equality".

In saying it had "nothing to do with racial unity" Coward was implying that the motivation was other than lofty ideals, not attempting to conceal that it is on the racial hinge that it will have the greatest negative impact.

Further exploring the chaotic thinking behind the demands she revealed that: "Some of the leading black thinkers involved in the report have previously attacked the idea as cultural relativism which undermines shared political and community values especially among disenfranchised white Britons." One of the authors for instance, Yasmin Alibhai Brown, had she revealed previously admitted that, "British multi-culturalism imposes what I would call an impossible demand. That is the demand for equality and difference."

Reason enough for Coward to conclude that multiculturalism "is not an innocent term neutrally implying that races and cultures cohabit together", rather it is as an ideology in itself "riddled with problems", and she adds pointedly, "it is not racist to think so."

In attempting to defend the report, one of the leading black thinkers referred to the former 'marxist' Stuart Hall, inadvertently underscoring Coward's point in admitting "that it is perfectly possible for multiculturalism and racism to exist". What is more "the country" he concedes "is divided into three rough groups. Some think that Britain's multicultural character gives vibrancy and cultural energy to life and wouldn't have it any other way".

"Others" he went on, tolerate "multicultural drift" but are "not passionately committed to it and hope, if they keep out of the urban areas, it will leave them alone." Finally there are "others who are passionately hostile to the idea and feel threatened and culturally undermined by it. A minority of those are prepared to stick knives into it, or set it alight when they encounter it on the streets."

Such is Hall's introspection, there is no acknowledgment that if after over thirty years of successive government promotion, considering (at least) two thirds of the population are at best ambivalent, there might just be one or two niggling problem with the message? Or even some recognition, it is primarily amongst 'the minority prepared to stick knives in it', that his report will have the most 'passionate' political purchase.

Even more alarming, of those 'that wouldn't have it any other way', the group who publicly 'cherish the ethnic contribution to fashion, food, music, art', do so as - consumers! Thus while they may be

**continued
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'The elephant in the sitting room syndrome'

continued from page 7

indignant at the thought of their 'lifestyle' coming under threat, it is unlikely they will lay down their lives for it. A little blood-letting for political ends is not anathema to all of course. So of the three 'roughs groups' some, as Hall himself concedes, are certainly prepared to be rougher than others. A not inconsiderable concern now that debate appears to be moving from the dinner table to the streets.

That in Hall's analysis the reality of Britain being divided 'roughly' in other, more fundamental ways too ie: upper, middle and working classes is entirely omitted, as if any such class cross reference was a political irrelevance. But then the whole drive of multiculturalism is not to do with racial unity, or with anti-racism or better still 'non'-racism as such. On the contrary, it's primary political function is to supplant issues of class with those of race instead. It does this by the pretence that in British society there is 'status, power and privilege that extends to all whites and is uniformly denied to all blacks'. Equally contrived is the acceptance that colour is a bond governing all else. And that the 'black community' therefore is a unitary whole, entirely homogeneous. Which allows a self-server like Trevor Phillips to remark: "Look at the upper echelons of any television company, look at Greg Dyke's new management board at the BBC: there's none of us there" (*Sunday Telegraph*, 15.10.00). Implying that if he was, the views and interests of all blacks would automatically be represented. This shallow belief in the overriding importance of melanin was wonderfully exposed by fellow Runnymede 'truster' Lady Gavron, with her twitty comment that "It would have been great if Prince Charles had been told to marry someone black. Imagine what message that would have sent out". All of it absolute idiocy of course, but because as intended, it is entirely non-threatening to the status quo, you will not find a mainstream politician to say so. But precisely because it is a con, it inevitably carries a sting.

And Coward by name, but not by nature, to her credit touches on it, without entirely appreciating the full implications: "The extreme Right is" she observes "gaining ground in Europe, even in erstwhile liberal countries such as Belgium and Norway. It flourishes on the back of racist propaganda about the dilution of cultural distinctiveness... It is easy to denounce those involved, much harder to analyse them." (*Observer*, 15.11.00)

In truth, the link Coward tentatively identifies between multiculturalism and Euro-nationalism is straightforward. The extreme Right, just like Alibhai-Brown, have properly identified core contradictions, and are feeding off them. As a consequence they have put themselves in position to benefit from racist and multicultural propaganda alike.

Writing in the *Guardian* (29.9.00), Faisal Bodi, a black activist, commented: "You can't expect black people to identify with each other on the basis of their colour alone, any more than you can expect it of whites." And he went on: "Once you start talking about an ethnic minority community, it's not a huge leap to think of an ethnic minority vote." And, he might have added, once you start talking up the ethnic minority vote, it's not a huge leap to think of 'an ethnic majority vote' either. Or as an article in *Red Action* put it over two and a half years ago: "Since the mid-80's the extreme Right have successfully attacked the multicultural concept on traditional grounds, appropriated the arguments for cultural diversity and separatist logic which follows, to suit its own agenda, and used this common sense approach to devastating effect in a host of countries to appeal to working class communities abandoned by both mainstream parties and the Left."

Or again, as Alibhai-Brown puts it in her recent pamphlet, *After Multiculturalism*: "In an ironic twist some of those who have most resented multiculturalism now use the arguments perfected by multiculturalists to

"I knew Britain was racist... but people like us often don't realise how bad it is"

Lady Gavron, vice-chairman of the Runnymede Trust's report, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*.



demand their fair share. The Right in Europe is busy cashing in on the enormous anxiety felt by many Europeans by building its politics on this paranoia."

Following his party's capturing of Belgium's second city, Antwerp, Filip Dewinter leader of the Vlaams Blok, was happy to explain the irresistible logic of appropriating 'arguments perfected' by multiculturalism in the process of ridiculing it. "I don't believe in all these cultures living together. We are the bosses around here. I don't like that people adopt little pieces out of other cultures. What is wrong with purity? We should not try to organise some kind of multicultural society. If I want to experience other cultures I will go to other countries." And he went on: "I sometimes go into Moroccan communities. These Moroccan restaurants they have Arabic writing on the walls. And the music they play. The women dress in hijabs. It's not our culture and I feel threatened." Or as Cardinal Giacomo Biff of Bologna, in arguing that Italian

immigration be restricted to Catholics in order to protect the "nation's identity" expressed it: "Muslims had different food, festivals and family morals" (*Guardian*, 30.11.00). It is expressions of 'common sense nationalism' like this which has convinced Red Action that 'the promotion of diversity' is not a barrier to Euro-nationalism as liberals maintain, but a sponsor.

So having herself called for multiculturalism to be scrapped, earlier in the year, how is it Yasmin Alibahi-Brown can both recognise why the Right is winning hearts and minds on the Continent, and at the same time assume her support for a ban on a "racial Britain" would not result in the Right cashing in on the 'paranoia' engendered over here?

The chaotic paralysis displayed, best summed up by fellow 'truster' Lady

Gavron's hilarious comment who just days after producing an 'expert' report, funded by a £350,000 Lottery grant said: "I knew Britain was racist before but people like us often don't realise how bad it is!" (*London Evening Standard*, 17.10.00)

It is an example of an eclecticism that is if anything even more pronounced within the European Left. Unnerved by objective reality, it is not prepared to discuss, much less 'smash' a rampant nationalism. Theoretically disarmed by its own hand, it stands there hapless and mute against the rising tide instead. A not dissimilar pattern is now visible here. Specialists in addiction call it the "elephant in the sitting room" syndrome. It is big and scary but, if it sits there long enough, it becomes easy to pretend it is part of the furniture. So rather than attempt to wrestle the initiative from the Right the Left, due to being committed to a strategy of denial, is thus both unwilling and unable, to break with a retrograde liberalism, for fear of being faced with the responsibility of addressing the issue on it's own. It thus stands exposed, 'as the greatest of cowards, for' to paraphrase Thomas Hazlitt 'it is afraid of itself' •

"Once you start talking about an ethnic minority community, it's not a huge leap to think of an ethnic minority vote." And he might have added, once you start talking up the ethnic minority vote, it's not a huge leap to think of 'an ethnic majority vote' either

communities of resistance

Hackney, E. London council in crisis

The Labour/Tory coalition that runs Hackney council are threatening savage cuts to services and the sacking of council staff, after the borough treasurer froze all but the most essential spending, due to a huge deficit that could come to as much as £40 million.

Members of Hackney Independent Working Class Association (IWCA) have attended the various demonstrations with a leaflet demanding "No more middle class councillors." The leaflet made clear the IWCA's view that "There is no point in looking to any of the

political parties on Hackney council. We need to replace the middle class parties on Hackney council with working class representatives. The time for protesting to the council has gone, we need our own representation."

The IWCA branch in Hackney has been involved in ongoing work in the south of the borough, on a variety of issues. Top priority has been the role the IWCA has played in the campaign against ITNet, the company that runs the privatised housing benefits service.

ITNet runs the service in both Hackney and Islington where they have caused unprecedented chaos and misery. However, the council has announced that it is to take the failing service back in house. And while the council will have to be kept under close scrutiny to ensure there are no u-turns, this represents a great victory for campaigners, and particularly for the IWCA

who were, despite what you may read in *Socialist Worker*, the only political organisation actively involved in the campaign. The IWCA had also held it's own successful advice surgery, to assist people with their benefit problems.

An IWCA spokesperson told the *Hackney Gazette*, "Now it's time to boot out all the councillors who allowed this scandal to wreck so many people's lives. None of them has a clue, or gives a damn, about what's going on in the lives of the working class majority they are supposed to represent."

Hackney IWCA have also been active around the issue of mobile phone masts on council estates, where a newsletter has been distributed and are to strengthen the branch by holding an introductory meeting for new contacts and supporters •

www.hackneyiwca@fsnet.co.uk

Our Homes- - Not For Sale! impressive ballot victories

campaigns have recently won a number of notable victories in places as far afield as High Wycombe and Waverley, South Bedfordshire and Lambeth.

In Lambeth, south London, the council no doubt regret offering tenants a final say in the first large-scale Public Private Partnership scheme, the £440 million *Project Vauxhall*.

The tenants on the Ethelred and China Walk estates voted No to a scheme that would have seen a loss of 411 council homes and the building of 2,500 luxury apartments. This was

despite council officers blackmailing tenants by telling them that if they voted No there would be no money for even basic repairs.

With opposition to the privatisation of Birmingham's 90,000 council homes growing, including a march of tenants and council workers recently (picture left), the Labour council narrowly voted to press ahead with the next stage of their plan, the biggest in England.

Despite the party leadership threatening rebel councillors with deselection, the plans were voted through with a majority of just eight •



John Prescott has recently suffered a number of setbacks to his plans to privatise the country's entire stock of council housing.

Council tenants are now waking up to New Labour's plans and local anti-privatisation

Scotswood, Newcastle 'we shall not be moved'

A development plan by Newcastle council named *Going for Growth* (GOG), demonstrates the reality of another of New Labour's 'community-led' regeneration schemes. At first many residents were delighted with GOG. Then they realised that the 6,600 homes in both Scotswood, with its stunning view over the river valley and Walker, next to the trendy quayside restaurants, were coloured red in the plans. Red indicated: "unviable", and meant that their homes were to be demolished to make way for developers. Local activist, Gwen Hinde, said "GOG is what we wanted: schools, transport, jobs. But they have left us, the community, out."

Immediately, banners appeared hanging from houses declaring "we shall not be moved", accompanied with 800-strong meetings and the drawing-up by community activists of their own alternative proposals. Tony Flynn, leader of the Labour council, dismissed their proposals as not "radical" enough. Kevan Jones, Labour's council cabinet member responsible for development, explained to the *Guardian* that his leader meant it was all about offering up "large areas [of land] which make it more attractive for developers." Private housebuilders have told the council that this amounts to a minimum of eight hectares - or the size of at least five football pitches - to build houses at prices which would be out of reach for most local residents.

A city-wide Newcastle Community Alliance has now been founded to oppose GOG and look at alternatives. An Alliance organiser summed it up: "Our aim is to get the council to withdraw its proposals for demolition and to make a positive commitment to the participation of the community, based on a genuine sharing of power and co-decision

making."

The council are in disarray and could be forced to modify or even abandon their plans. A leaked Labour party document has labelled the whole affair a "PR disaster" which might have dire "political consequences", undermining Labour's electoral base in the city. It also criticised the party for totally misjudging the public mood and dismissing the opposition as a few SWP'ers. "It wasn't the SWP who had 'Save Our Scotswood' posters printed and arranged for them to be put up in people's windows, or they who produced the homemade banners hung from people's windows"; said the Labour report.

The Liberal Democrats, in true opportunistic fashion, have tried to capitalise on the discontent with Labour by jumping on the bandwagon - they obviously view Newcastle, like former Labour citadels such as Liverpool and Sheffield, as ripe for the taking. Undoubtedly, the commu-

nity of Scotswood is off it's knees. In the long term it is essential that a form of organised independent working class politics is developed in the area, not just to protest against Labour or keep out the Lib Dems, but to replace them •



GROWING PAINS

Sinn Fein - a party in transition

“Cool judgement, says the far Right, is not on the march across Europe. Extreme Right parties do not exist, in for example Ireland and Iceland and are irrelevant in Greece and Spain” so Cas Mudde a lecturer at Edinburgh University informed and reassured Guardian readers a few days after both Belgium and Norway lent an ear to the siren call of the Right.

Whatever the significance of the absence of the far Right in Iceland their absence in Ireland is easily cleared up. To begin with, very public attempts circa 1997 to set up just such a party were crushed by a combination of Anti-Fascist Action in Ireland, and physical backing from elements within Sinn Fein (SF).

Second, the political vacuum in all other countries not mentioned in Mr Mudde's analysis, is being filled in Ireland by SF itself. In doing so, SF are breaking the mold. As important therefore as that reality is a study of how they are doing it.

Prior to the Hunger strikes in 1981 the Republican Movement had no electoral profile anywhere in the country. This was corrected in a strategy assessment shortly afterwards. In 1983 Alex Maskey won their first council seat in West Belfast. For the next decade the electoral concentration was conducted exclusively within a Six Counties context. Unsurprisingly, British occupation, the border, and the war dominated what was a revolutionary nationalist programme and agenda.

Despite understandable set-backs Republicans, to the chagrin of both the SDLP and Unionism, gradually began to make their political presence felt at a community level. This growing electoral appeal and ambition was significantly boosted by the implementation of their peace strategy, which resulted in the IRA cease-fire in 1994.

From then on, while SF have continued to make ground on the SDLP in the north, the real arena of struggle is opening up in the south. As the only all-Ireland party,

the marketing advantage this allows SF in contesting elections on any part of the island is immeasurable. A fact acknowledged by pundits in the 26 counties whose predictions have given the more established parties kittens since SF took over 60 local and district seats in elections in 1998. More recently an opinion poll rating gave Gerry Adams a 67% approval rating. In the furor, what has practically gone unnoticed is that SF is changing. This is reflected in the increasing emphasis on the social over the national, and as a consequence on the composition of the membership.

The fact is, SF is in transition even as it advances. That it is able to do this, is in part a subliminal recognition by much of its potential support that the war for

national liberation and the struggle for sovereignty is as good as won. Thus in adapting to the new reality (it itself created) SF is gradually shedding a revolutionary nationalist skin, in favour of a radical working class socialist one. This has not been without some shedding of membership as well.

The recent rounds of selection conventions around the country have shown the continuing process of development within SF and the movement generally. In rapidly developing areas of growth for SF, both on the A list, i.e. very winnable seats at the next election and their B list, of possibilities to become very winnable in five years time, there have been bitter battles. Basically new people and new thinking is pushing SF forward in the 26 counties. Those we have met who are doing the pushing, are clear of SF's socialism and on the need for the party to have deep roots sunk through community activism. Wherever SF had a foothold in a community 2 years ago, they now have a large base. Two or three people struggling for years, now have 30 plus people organised in 3 or 4 cummáns (branches). How?

One, through the collapse of the working class and youth vote for all the other parties and two, due to their own determination to do serious consultative work in communities. Councillors will be secured in very large numbers in the next couple of years, something that is largely overlooked when people are focussing on growth at a TD and parliamentary level only. At the same time in many areas the movement has continued to be dominated by veterans of the 'Border campaign', many of whom have remained oblivious to all political developments in the last 20 years, and who now that public representatives are being secured, see themselves as much more suitable, and moreover, see the newer elements as wholly unsuitable.

Many of these individuals have started to resurface, joining the newly formed cummáns, where many in the past have been the lone SF voice in the area. Sometimes, even as elected councillors they find a newly invigorated SF cummáns hard to deal with. In a recent dispute in Wexford where a young local councillor was selected, another councillor and 15 to 20 'old guard' walked out of the convention. These individuals are generally speaking representative of a layer who should have left in 1986 (in the split led by Ruairi Ó Brádaigh) had there been anyone locally to take them. They are oblivious to SF's social programme, and overly concerned with how people stand to attention for the national anthem, how the flag is presented at meetings and so on!

These tensions have been mirrored across a number of the key seats, and coming on the back of defections to the 32 County Sovereignty grouping (and mirroring the same backward thinking) the outcome of such disputes are extremely significant. As things stand they show a movement in a state of flux, a movement with enormous potential but not yet having completed the process of transition. Despite this, SF have the potential not only to be a beacon of hope in Ireland, but as importantly, a beacon of hope in Europe •

J. McNamara



Gerry Adams joins Dublin City Councillor Nicky Kehoe on one of the local party's twice weekly, 30 to 40 member strong leaflettings. "It's our relationship with the people that makes us different. We're not looking to tell people, but listen to people. That's the difference, and to listen to people, well you have to be near them", Nicky Kehoe, Sinn Fein.

A protracted campaign to deny AFA a voice on Glasgow's Refugee Committee saw a leading SWP member offer the extraordinary explanation that it is...

"ONLY A GAME!"

When a militant anti-fascist was denied the opportunity to stand for a position on the Glasgow Campaign To Welcome Refugees committee, it was the latest and most public attempt to prevent Anti-Fascist Action having any influence in regard to the tactics for working in communities in which refugees have been dispersed.

From the beginning, AFA has tried to play a positive part in the campaign but has met with opposition and obstacles from the outset. Obviously AFA's position of putting forward the idea of some equity between the issues relating to the refugees, and the issues relating to the community, is rejected by all other organisations. When the very first public meeting was announced, AFA attempted to get a speaker; but were informed by Dave Sherry (SWP) that there were 'too many speakers'. Even when three failed to show, AFA was still denied a platform. Then a public meeting in Partick was cancelled with 30 minutes notice. The AFA members - the only ones who turned up - were informed by the caretaker!

At the next meeting in Govanhill, AFA was accused of being "boot boys". Unsurprisingly this smear came from a SWP member. On leaving the meeting an AFA member was even asked as to how he "became an anti-fascist". (Perhaps the absence of a caftan confused this enlightened lefty?) Our next encounter came at the first meeting of the Glasgow-wide campaign. When AFA attempted to raise the matter 'of working on the ground', and also to ask for an explanation for the Partick cancellation, the response was to ignore us, and for the Chair to continue through the set agenda, with no reference to the points AFA had raised. Due to this attitude the AFA members left the meeting.

In response AFA decided to produce a leaflet. Titled "Are Refugees Welcome Here?" and distributed it at the next meeting. In it, we laid out where the blame really lies for increased race attacks, highlighting the difference between locals who were racist, and those who were merely reacting to their communities suffering shortages of services. It also commented on the all important shortfall in government provision for the refugees, which naturally brought class into the equation. Taking into account the success of far-Right parties in both Europe and Britain, it asked whether the campaign should be based on some Left-wing idea of 'morality, or on concrete political realities'.

For example, when it was raised that refugees had been physically attacked in the Red Road area of Glasgow by local youth, AFA asked what the campaign would do about it, and whether it might be necessary to physically defend the refugees. The temporary chair of the meeting, Angela McCormick (SWP), stated that "the campaign will have no part in the use of force", but then added "that if AFA felt it wanted to carry out this course of action it should as an alternative". Needless to say AFA declined the invitation to carry out an action. The campaign's decision, was to hold a public meeting to raise the issue of the attacks within the local community. Up to the point of writing (3 months) no public meeting has taken place. Interestingly, at the end of the meeting AFA members had a discussion with some refugees from the Red Road area under attack. Ironically, given the attitude of the chair, the common ground between AFA and the refugees, and the solutions to the position they found themselves in was immediately apparent.

At the next meeting the election for positions on the committee was on the agenda. When the matter was previously discussed, the 'desperate need for people to step forward' was stressed. Two people were then proposed as joint Secretary



AFA's position is of putting forward the idea of some equity between the issues relating to refugees, and those relating to impoverished host communities (such as those in Easterhouse above).

(even though one was not present) and were voted in. AFA then put forward its candidate for press officer, and were taken back when the chair insisted "this could not be voted on and would have to be remitted to the next meeting". When asked why AFA were denied the same rights as others proposed for the committee, the response was a barrage of abuse from the floor of the meeting. Everything from being 'too aggressive', to having 'no involvement in the campaign' was voiced. Funnily enough the woman who stated that "we were unknown to those at the meeting" then proceeded to propose two others who she admitted "she didn't know too much about, but who she thought had said some good things". It may have been a coincidence that both were black, but in any case both declined to stand.

Although the debacle of the Committee election was the most striking aspect of this meeting, it was not the only thing that happened that evening. Once again the issue of attacks on refugees came up, with Wynford being the area focused on this time. When again it was suggested that the solution to the attacks was to hold a public meeting, inviting the local Labour MP Maria Fyfe to speak, AFA asked why 'a member of the party mainly responsible for the position that both the refugees and the host community find themselves in was being invited'.

The response from the floor was that Maria Fyfe was the elected representative and was 'personally okay'. 'If the area was represented by the BNP or the Tories would it still be felt necessary to offer them a platform?' it was then asked. That they were anti-racist "no matter who they represented" was the only criteria that mattered we were informed. When again it was proposed that it would be a better idea to try to find a speaker from within the Wynford area who could speak 'to and was from the local community', the idea, that this could happen was ridiculed.

At the end of this meeting heated discussions took place between AFA members and the SWP. Interestingly, AFA were told that these meetings 'were not intended for political debate', and anyway, the SWP 'were sick of the internet debate between Red Action and the Left' then underway. Red Action were 'political purists, aggressive, middle-class haters' etc. When challenged that such obvious sectarianism was unlikely to benefit the campaign, the SWP chair brushed aside the criticism with the extraordinary comment that "it's only a game" •

M. Kenny

inside the...

LSA

AT THE LONDON steering committee meeting on August 9 Red Action put forward a resolution which read: "In light of the 80,000 votes for the BNP in May, the doubling of recorded racial incidents, the overt hostility encountered by some LSA canvassers in Haringey, plus the Tories, despite playing the race card themselves, being knocked into third place by the BNP in the Bexley by-election, this meeting recognises that the left is not winning the argument on the issue of race and immigration, and the LSA support for current tactics and strategies are in need of urgent review."

The resolution was discussed at the following meeting on September 5. In order to further clarify our concern with the way things were going, a supporting document was circulated to steering committee members before hand. On the evening itself, the debate was allowed approximately 20 minutes. As there were more than two dozen in attendance and many of them spoke, the debate as *Weekly Worker* admitted, was somewhat "truncated".

The position forwarded by Red Action was straightforward. The Left was not winning the argument in working class areas. Particular criticism was reserved for 'Refugees Welcome Here!' type posters ('the worst form of communication'). Even more damaging, the core message was seen to be "a declaration of a free standing principle without even a nod in the direction of class."

Above all the LSA, "rather than allow the Right to continue to set the agenda, must strive to put [immigration] in a class context and socialise the issue instead."

On top of all that, the working class "is not unitary at this moment. In fact the cleavage is at least as great at this juncture, as the cleavage has at other time beer between classes... In a nutshell the inalienable logic of arguments that seem self evident at one end of the class, can seriously alienate at the other."

While the subsequent debate was free of the racist inferences that so heavily disfigured debate in the UK Left internet discussion site, and also in exchanges in the letters pages of the *Weekly Worker*, the contradictions were all too apparent. For example, in rebutting the need for any 'review', Weyman Bennett, LSA candidate for Haringey, maintained the slogans were 'vote winners': "Every meeting I went to I was applauded for our stance on the issue." Even if there was time, it would have seemed churlish to point out that the vast majority at those meetings, were members of the his own party, the SWP!

Moreover the real problem was not with the 800-odd who voted LSA, but the 95%, of a largely working class constituency, who couldn't bring themselves to do so. As many made clear on the doorstep, this alienation was not unrelated to the LSA presentation on asylum. Summing up, Bennett remarked that a class aspect was not entirely ignored as "we had to raise class issues because of the stance of the council on refugees".

Just as disingenuously, practically every speaker who

spoke against the resolution went out of

their way to place the refugee issue within the context of class. So ironically, in the process of defending the slogans, they choose to emphasise the missing content which formed the basis of the Red Action criticism of them!

Neither was it all one way traffic. A delegate from the Socialist Party said it would be a mistake to 'dismiss the resolution out of hand'. It was critical he stressed that the arguments were class based. He quoted from his own experience an incident which occurred within a packed, hostile and heavily BNP-influenced tenants meeting on the Isle of Dogs in 1993. By simply suggesting 'tenants occupy yuppie flats in the area' he effectively redirected anger away from the Asians being targeted, thereby splitting the racist consensus of the meeting.

And if 'Smash all Immigration Controls' was considered such a vote winner it was 'a little surprising it was dropped for the duration of the by-election campaign in Haringey' a CPGB delegate remarked wryly. Two independents also spoke, both stressing the need for 'LSA propaganda to be clearly understood'.

Summing up, the Red Action delegate reminded the committee that "If propaganda has a purpose, it is to explain and convince". As the current stance of the LSA does neither, the consequence, will he warned, not "affect immigration policy, won't affect how individual refugees are treated, but, will seriously damage the credibility of the LSA in working class areas".

Curiously when it came to the vote, the CPGB, Socialist Party, a delegate from the RDG plus the two independents all - abstained. Another delegate who actually voted against the Red Action resolution, admitted almost at once at being 'unhappy at the dishonest way the debate was conducted'. It transpired she had canvassed in Haringey and had been instructed 'not to bring race into it unless they do'.

If such behaviour was not odd enough, Mike Marqusee a leading and influential member, who had spoken most passionately against the need for any strategic review had a letter published in the *Weekly Worker* a fortnight later basically instigating one!

In the letter he argued "it was idle to expect any single slogan to strike a chord among the many different sections of a fragmented working class." What is more, the existing LSA message "without contextualisation and inevitably some qualification does not add up" he admitted. It is therefore vitally important, he concluded, "we find punchy ways to express the underlying class content of the issue."

What does this show? Two things: one, the Left is determined to bring all the antiquated and discredited methods into the new formations. Secondly, the harsh reality of the political mainstream is forcing adjustments on them which could not be achieved by pure logic alone. At this pace of change, the Left will be entirely unrecognisable come the council elections in 2002. And it will need to be •

Something We Said!?!?

Red Action has been grossly criticised for daring to be involved in an anti-mugging campaign in Birmingham and for venturing to suggest that the SWP slogan 'Asylum Seekers Welcome Here' was simplistic and unwise. This mirrored our unhappiness when the old Leeds Class War group refused to distribute 'No Muggers No Burglars' stickers in case they were seen as "racist", and our sense of unease that the May Day 20000 publicity included a sticker with a virtually identical slogan on Asylum Seekers to the SWP. The more things change the more they remain the same!

London Calling, Class War Newsletter, October 2000

Someone asked about 'parity of esteem'. There can't be parity of esteem between Apartheid and non-racialism. We have to say it is wrong. What are apologising for? Sorry that we fought for freedom? No. We are committed to non-racialism. We don't accede to their bluster, to concede to some weird arrangement of special treatment, or a special number of seats or some 'concession' like that.

Robert Macbride, legendary ANC operative, *Republican News*, 21.9.00

You have to free yourself in your head. Only then can you about a transformation in society. Even if there was a revolutionary socialist government here it would not be able to do all that is necessary. It would run up against partition. The people you are dealing with not only feel disempowered, but they have no role models today. Go into a proud working class areas of Dublin like Sean McDermott Street, where nearly 100 people have died from the drugs, the response shows the disempowerment of people. If we leave it all to small groups of activists, then we won't get the Ireland we're looking for. Empowerment is a prerequisite.

Gerry Adams, *Republican News*, 21.9.00

All the democratic parties have pledged not to form alliances with the Vlaams Blok. Due to the attitude of other parties, it is doomed to disappear in the long run. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is because of their attitudes that the Vlaams Blok is flourishing. *Guardian* journalist, Gary Younge, on the comments of the Belgian premier after the far-right party won a third of the votes in Antwerp city elections earlier this year.