

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM

ANTI-RACIST TACTICS IN HACKNEY

TIME FOR A RETHINK

Now that the general election is over, and with it the latest spate of police-protected NF marches, it is time to sum up the lessons of the anti-racist struggle that has built up in Hackney during recent months. What programmes of action should be adopted in the months ahead?

Rising anger

There has been, as reported in previous issues of "New Age", a growing feeling of indignation among black people in Hackney against harassment by police, coupled with the free hand given by police to racist thuggery by the NF and their like.

It is particularly young black people who suffer from police harassment. Day after day cases come to light of black youths who are picked up under the antiquated and reactionary 'sus' law (the Suspicion of Vagrancy Act, 1824). Often their 'crime' has been merely to be looking in shop windows or at cars.

A favourite trick is for the police to pick up the youths on Friday night and detain them over the weekend, releasing them on Sunday night without charging them so that no case has to be presented to the magistrates on Monday morning. Beatings-up by the police regularly occur. And Hackney police specialise in what they call 'fishing-triangles' — this means barging into black peoples' homes on the pretext of suspecting that they are harbouring illegal immigrants.

Not surprisingly, black people in Hackney are refusing to put up with all this, and there now exist the beginnings of some organised resistance. The Hackney Black Peoples Defence Organisation (HBPDO) was formed, and organised legal defense, picketing of law courts, leafletting, emergency phone numbers for those in difficulties, etc.

Black parents organise

Some women comrades in HBPDO recently contacted the parents of black youths whom they knew to have been harassed by the police. A meeting of these people was held at the end of March, from which there resulted the formation of the Hackney Black Parents Association (HBPA).

Heaven help the police, local MPs, etc. now! One of our CWM comrades helped on the organisation of this meeting and was fortunate enough to witness some of the vigour and enthusiasm of it. There is no way the police will manage to break up this organisation.

Most of those who participate in this parents group are women. They have got the group off the ground very rapidly, and are putting in a lot of hard work on petitions, etc. Their work is bound to develop in strength and scope in the coming months.

Trots play disruptive role

Some of those involved in these activities are from Trotskyist organisations. While some have done some good work, the re-



Michael Ferreira... His murder led to the formation of the Hackney Black Peoples' Defence Organisation.

sults of some of their actions are harmful.

For example, Trots in the HBPDO were opposed to the setting up of the parents organisation as an independent group. They insisted that the parents should work under the auspices of HBPDO. Nevertheless, those comrades who were set on organising the parents meeting went ahead and did so on the grounds that the Trots concerned were not parents (or even, for that matter, residents of Hackney).

The Trots promptly went into a sulk and refused to attend the parents meeting, or to baby-sit for parents who wished to attend the meeting. Such was their high-and-mighty attitude when local working class people actually started to organise!

Another example of how the Trots go about their business was when some parents refused them permission to publicise the cases of their children who had recently been harassed by police. The Trots totally disregarded these parents' wishes and went ahead and printed a leaflet on these youths' cases, which they distributed in Ridley Rd. Market!

'Opportunist' is the only word for such people. Instead of welcoming the self-reliant struggles of local working class people, and working to support their initiatives and lead them onward, they merely jump on the bandwagon and try to take all the credit for their own organisations in the hope of winning the odd recruit.

Marching on...

One feature of the anti-racist struggle in Hackney that needs to be re-thought is the constant call for marches. Has marching become a fetish? Sometimes one has been led to wonder what some of the marches have achieved.

For instance, one recent Sunday demonstration coincided with an NF turnout. Both marches went down Brick Lane at the same time. As there were not many police around that time, this meant that when going under bridges in this narrow lane, the two marches literally rubbed shoulders. The middle-headed young Aryans whom the NF had

scraped together were ritually bawled at by the anti-racists. And they bawled back. What sort of a game is this?

Hardly a black face is to be seen on such marches. No local people joined in the anti-racist march. And a frequent after-effect is that the NF have a wonderful time harassing the Bengali community in the evening after the white anti-racists have gone home.

Not surprisingly, many people in this threatened community are beginning to ask themselves whether the participants in such marches are taking part merely for the good of their own souls. This natural cynicism has resulted in the fact that the Bengalis who actually live in the Brick Lane area, including the Bengali Youth Movement which has played such an active part in local struggles, have virtually boycotted these 'heroic' marches which take place through their community.

We do not for a moment wish to denigrate the massive anti-racist marches in Southall and elsewhere which really have seen communities out in the streets. We merely wish to draw attention to the fact that in Hackney and Tower Hamlets marches seem to have become the de-all-and-end-all for some people recently, and we see the need to raise the question of what some of the recent marches have been aimed at and what results they have had.

The way forward

To conclude, then, the post-election weeks should provide a good opportunity for thinking over anti-racist tactics. We suggest that the following points are important to discuss:

* Propaganda: Various organisations have produced anti-racist leaflets, etc. For instance, the Hackney Committee Against Racism (HCAR) brought out one exposing racist lies about housing, and a pamphlet exposing the sexism of NF policies. There is a lot more scope for such projects, along with discussions, meetings, etc., to achieve a higher level of understanding among anti-racists about how to counter racist and fascist ideology. A long-term aim

should be to win over working class anti-racist activists to some ideas of scientific socialism — for example, to show how racist ideas grow out of Britain's imperialist past and present.

* Work in the community: Rather than fetishising marches as a goal in themselves, work should be concentrated in the black and Asian communities so that the anti-racist movement becomes dominated by local working class initiatives. This is the only way to throw off the influence of opportunist outsiders of the Tariq Ali kind who try to dash in and make a name for themselves whenever a struggle arises. As a good example of the kind of initiative that deserves support, we have described the Hackney Black Parents' Association.

* Self-reliance: We strongly support self-reliance by black and Asian groups. Too many initiatives by black people (as by other people involved in struggles) have been quashed by opportunist outsiders coming in and making out that they have an answer to everything. Only black and Asian people themselves are in a position to have a thorough understanding of their struggle. This is not at all to suggest that white anti-racists are unimportant in the struggle. On the contrary, they have a duty to participate. The point is that all anti-racists, both black and white, will have a better lead, and consequently be able to be most effective, if the initiatives and actions undertaken grow out of the real conditions of black peoples' struggles.

* The role of the state: The election results have been very bad for the NF. It is quite likely that their particular brand of openly Nazi racism will now receive less support from the state. For instance, there is much less justification for the massive police protection of their activities than there might have been if the election results had justified their claims to represent the views of a sizeable proportion of society. It will certainly be good if we hear less of them in future months. However, it must be remembered that NF thuggery is fairly localised and occasional compared to the constant, day-by-day racist harassment by the police, immigration authorities and other state bodies. It should also be remembered that the NF would not have been able to march 50 yards down any street in the country if it had not been protected by the state. Revolutionaries should always bear in mind that racism is built into the divisive system of capitalism itself and is embodied above all in the racist practices of the capitalist state. Anti-racists should accordingly concentrate their campaigning on the forces of the state, not merely the little gangs of Nazis which the state manages to parade around.