

No Pasaran

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50p

● fighting against racist attacks

● what's happening in France

● trade union action in Wakefield

● answering asylum myths

How can we stop the BNP?



What we think

Who opened the door to the BNP?

The anger and alienation that the British National Party (BNP) have been able to exploit are both products of the looting of Britain by big business carried out over the last 20-30 years.

Under the rule of first Thatcher, then Major and now Blair, most of Britain's public assets have been 'sold' off. This legalised robbery (commonly known as privatisation) has created a disastrous and lethal situation on the railways, destroyed the ability of the National Health Service to provide decent health care, cut local services to the bone and sacked a huge number of public sector workers in the interests of increasing profits for their new, private bosses.

The destruction of British manufacturing industry was a deliberate policy of Thatcher. She aimed to destroy strong trade unions by attacking trade union rights and by shutting down the industries the strongest unions were based on. These jobs were then replaced with casualised, insecure jobs where workers are at the mercy of their bosses.

Britain is now a low-wage economy. British workers work the longest hours in Europe but lack of investment in machinery or training by the bosses means that productivity is still low. Unemployment and under-employment are a huge problem. In some areas there are now three or more generations who have lived their lives on benefits, without finding regular work.

New Labour

Instead of investment to provide jobs, services and solutions to these social and economic problems, New Labour have continued the Tory policies that are destroying our communities.

In an attempt to divert anger away from their policies, New Labour began to scapegoat asylum-seekers for the lack of local services in Dover and other areas early on in their first term of office. Under pressure from the media, New Labour began a series of attacks on asylum rights that still continue today.

These attacks - including vouchers, dispersal, increases in the use of detention and deportation, and now the scrapping of benefits for the majority of

asylum seekers who apply in-country - have had two effects. They have made it much harder for asylum-seekers and refugees to get the rights they should be entitled to, but also they have reinforced the worst prejudices about asylum seekers spread by the media, implying that asylum-seekers come to Britain because they are attracted by benefit levels etc.

New Labour have also spectacularly failed to deal with institutional racism. Forced to call the Lawrence Inquiry soon after they were first elected in 1997, New Labour were opposed racism in public while privately they were giving the green light to allow the police to continue as before.

The refusal of the government to sack Paul Condon (Chief of the Metropolitan Police) and their failure to take disciplinary action against any of the police officers most involved in ensuring that the murderers of Stephen Lawrence were never convicted, was a message that the police and racists up and down the country understood as: 'you can get away with it'.

Racist attacks and harassment

In the year after the Lawrence Inquiry, the level of racist attacks reported to the police more than doubled. Since then, they have been rising steadily.

Meanwhile, police harassment of black and Asian communities has intensified. Police stop and searches of Asian people increased by 16% in 2001-02 compared with 2000-01; those of black people increased by 6%; while those of white people fell by 2%. In London the Metropolitan Police stopped 40% more Asians and 30% more black people, but 8% fewer white people.

The terrible social and economic conditions that the majority of people suffer from in Britain, combined with New Labour's whipping up of prejudice and encouragement of racism, has provided the BNP with the opportunity to grow.

Why is the establishment so scared of the BNP?

The establishment is happy to whip up racism and prejudice as long as these things serve its purposes, but now the situation has escalated out of its control. Now that the BNP has shown that it can

exploit the same issues, the establishment is worried about the increasing instability this can cause in Britain (e.g. the riots in Oldham and other towns in 2001, and the rise in attacks on asylum-seekers).

The BNP is an embarrassment to the establishment, who fear that the BNP may provoke a mass movement of young people determined to stop the growth of the far-right. The last thing that the government and big business want is the radicalisation that such a movement would bring.

This is the real reason why the main parties and the mainstream media in Britain have united against the BNP. Not because they are democrats - since when have careerist politicians or the multimillionaire press barons really represented the needs of working-class people? Not because they are against racism - they are quite happy to use racism and other prejudices such as Islamophobia when it will serve their own purposes.

An opposition to the BNP that depends on careerist politicians from the main parties is doomed to failure. Having opened the door to the BNP, New Labour and the other main parties are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Who can stop the BNP?

The forces that are capable of taking on and defeating the far-right are the trade unions and the left, combined with young people and local community campaigns. A mass movement is needed that can organise mass action - demos, protests and community self-defence - against the threat of the BNP, as well as win the battle of ideas with them.

However it is not only the movement organised specifically to combat the BNP that has the power to stop their growth. As the interview with a French activist on page 9 shows, a big working-class movement can marginalise the far-right.

With the continued attacks on workers and the welfare state from New Labour, anti-racists and the left must link up with the trade unions in an effort to build a movement to defend workers' rights and put a halt to the government's privatisation madness, attacks on pensions and . . .

On the next page we set out the key aims and methods that the YRE believes are needed in today's campaign against the growth of the BNP.



No Pasaran is the magazine of Youth against Racism in Europe. No Pasaran, which is Spanish for 'they shall not pass', was the slogan of the anti-fascist movement in Europe in the 1930s.

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Stop the Nazi BNP

A pamphlet from the YRE including:
-what is fascism?
-how the YRE helped drive the BNP out of Tower Hamlets
-organising community defence campaigns against Nazi violence

£1 including p&p from the YRE

Campaigning against the far-right today

The immediate aims of the campaign:

1. Halt the growth of the BNP and prevent them from building new bases.
2. Answer the lies spread by the BNP & help to reduce the influence of the racist ideas and prejudices that the BNP reinforce.
3. Expose the cynical betrayals of New Labour (Tory policies of cuts and privatisation), as well as the divide & rule tactics New Labour and the rest of the establishment use.
4. Build positive community and trade union campaigns for better resources and local services for all, in a way that can help unite local communities.
5. Encourage trade unions, the left, & genuine local community campaigns to stand credible candidates in elections, providing a positive alternative to the pro-big business policies of the main parties & the lies of the BNP.

Methods of campaigning:

A mass campaign of education

This should aim to expose the BNP's real nature and convince the majority of people in each local area that:

- the BNP have no answers to their problems;
- the BNP are a threat that they need to actively campaign against.

It is important to expose the neo-Nazi ideas and history of the BNP. However, it would be a real mistake to stop there. Anti-BNP material, if it is to be effective, must concentrate on the threat that the BNP pose today rather than constant repetitions of (for example) Nazi atrocities carried out in Germany over 50 years ago.

Today the BNP present themselves as anti-cuts, anti-privatisation, anti-war, as for workers' rights and against trade union bureaucrats on huge salaries. More than ever before, the BNP are trying to steal the arguments of the left in order to attract support.

The BNP's attempt to sell themselves as radicals, and their lack of any real alternative to the policies of the main parties, must be exposed. Their criticisms of mainstream politicians, job losses, cuts, privatisation and corruption often strike a chord with many people. But they are incapable of really fighting to change anything for the better. This must be exposed with local examples of how the BNP have failed to live up to even their own rhetoric on issues like privatisation, cuts and workers' rights.

Campaign for a positive alternative

Just attacking the BNP and their actions won't stop people from voting for them or supporting them. We have to show that the campaign against the BNP has a better alternative to the dead-end of hatred and despair that they offer.

We must link opposition to the BNP to positive campaigns for 'jobs, homes & services, not racism', including taking up local issues like campaigns for more and better youth clubs etc. This will help to build credibility for the campaign against the BNP at the same time as providing a positive pole of attraction to pull the BNP's loosest supporters away from their influence.

Mass action

Protests and demonstrations are an essential way of isolating and marginalising the BNP, demoralising their activists and supporters, and of giving confidence to people to publicly oppose them.

Any demonstrations must be well-organised and -stewarded to ensure that people can be confident that the organisers take protecting their safety seriously. This is particularly important in areas where the police have consistently attacked anti-racist events while protecting the far-right, and/or where the BNP has a relatively large base.

Where there is a need, local community defence campaigns against racist and neo-Nazi violence should be built. These must be democratically run so that they involve the maximum number of people and are genuinely accountable to the local community.

All protests and demonstrations must also be organised and built for in the local communities where they are to take place. Bringing in large numbers of supporters from outside the area where the protest is happening, without building a solid base of support and a turn-out from the local area, is counter-productive - in the long run this tactic tends to push a section of people in the area towards the BNP rather than win them away from it.

Election analysis

The local elections in May 2003 were the biggest ever success for the BNP. They won 13 council seats, bringing the total number of councillors up to 16 (two of the five seats they had won during the previous year were up for election).

The BNP won 2 seats in Sandwell, one in Dudley, one in Stoke-on-Trent, one in Broxbourne and another seat in Calderdale to add to their existing one (though in a different ward).

In Burnley the BNP went from three to eight councillors, and briefly became the official opposition to Labour, who control the council. Just over six weeks later the Liberal Democrats won a by-election, increasing their councillors from seven to eight, even with the BNP.

Nick Griffin, the BNP leader claimed that the BNP were on their way to winning control of Burnley council. The BNP made large gains in Burnley, getting just over 200 votes less than Labour across the whole council. However if you look at the figures closely, the BNP vote in Burnley also dropped from 9,984 (an average vote of 768) in May 2002 to 8,563 (an average vote of 659) in May 2003.

In the two seats the BNP won in May 2002, where you would have expected an increased vote if the BNP were building solid support, their vote also fell.

However the BNP were able to win far more seats because the vote of the main parties collapsed even further - in some seats Labour's vote dropped by around a third. Not surprising, given that Burnley's Labour Council has carried on with the same unpopular policies that gave the BNP the chance to grow in the first place. Just before the local elections they pushed through £1 million worth of cuts in services (including compulsory redundancies, cuts in leisure services and withdrawing grants from most voluntary groups over a period of three years) at the same time as increasing council tax.

As we explain elsewhere (see pages 2-4), we cannot depend on the main parties to help us defeat the BNP. We need to build a mass movement and a new alternative to halt the BNP's growth.

BNP total votes

In England, the BNP got over 90,000 votes standing in 218 council wards (an average of 420 in each ward). In Wales the only BNP candidate to stand for the Welsh Assembly got 2,310 votes (2%). In Scotland, the BNP's only council candidate (in East Ayrshire) got 73 votes (5%).

Other far-right votes

National Front candidates got a total vote of 1,860 standing in ten wards (nine in England and one in Scotland); an average vote of 186 per ward.

The **Freedom Party**, a split off from the BNP, won one councillor in South Staffordshire (a Tory council). They got a total of 2,613 votes in five wards in the Midlands; an average of 523 votes in each ward.

The **Third Way** got 298 votes in the one ward they stood in.

BNP votes in Burnley

Ward	May 2002	May 2003
Bank Hall	663	505
Briercliffe	—	877 *
Brunshaw	919	715
Cliviger	898 *	795 *
Coalclough	622	532
Daneshouse	—	—
Gannow	817 * (for one year)	687 *
Gawthorpe	783	712
Hapton	722	661 *
Lanehead	834	688 *
Queensgate	781	612
Rosegrove	751 * (for one year)	—
Rosehill	812	634
Trinity	643	491
Whittlefield	739	654 *

* means BNP councillor elected.

In 2003 the Labour Party got 8785 votes (standing 16 candidates in 15 seats; an average of 549 votes per seat). The BNP got 8563 (standing 13 candidates in 13 seats; an average of 659 votes per seat).

What kind of threat are the BNP today?

by Naomi Byron, YRE secretary

How far has Nick Griffin's project to reinvent the BNP as a far-right populist party gone? The vote that the BNP received in May 2003 has strengthened this process (though not completed it), and weakened the wing within the BNP that is most impatient to return to the strategy of street violence.

Griffin's rejection of his past position - that control of the streets was the aim of the far-right, not looking respectable and standing in elections - looks likely to hold firm. While some BNP members have been involved in a few scuffles, and are still prone to the odd slip (like the Nazi salutes given by BNP members leaving the count in Burnley after the May elections), these appear at the moment to be the exception rather than the rule.

There is no question of the leaders of the BNP and the hardcore of experienced members having fundamentally changed their neo-Nazi ideas - this new behaviour is purely a tactic aimed at breaking the BNP out of the marginal position it has always occupied.

The BNP has turned to this new strategy because they recognise that building a neo-Nazi organisation of more than a few thousand (the aim of the BNP's previous leader John Tyndall) is impossible in the current political situation in Britain. Fed up of their isolation, they have decided to try to copy more successful far-right groups like the 'Freedom Party' in Austria and the National Front in France.

The BNP's new public face

To make themselves more respectable and electable, the BNP have changed a number of their public policies. For example, they have dropped their public demand for 'compulsory repatriation' in favour of 'voluntary repatriation' of 'non-British' people living in Britain (as far as the BNP are concerned this means

non-white).

Their policy of making homosexuality illegal has also been dropped (though in at least one internal meeting it was explained to BNP members that this was only for public consumption).

This turn has brought the BNP its biggest electoral successes ever, as well as huge publicity.

Fascism not on the agenda

A mass fascist movement is not a threat in Britain today. The BNP cannot build some kind of mass fascist force in Britain over the next few years. Classical fascism, like that of Hitler and Mussolini in the 1920s and 1930s, was a mass force of the ruined middle classes whose aim was to crush the working-class and its organisations.

Fascism used a combination of common prejudices and radical phrases to attract support, in the same way that the BNP does today. However, a fascist movement, by its very nature, must back up its populist propaganda with physical violence. The battle for control of the streets is essential, and this is what the BNP has backed off from in order to gain electoral successes.

Despite their insignificant size, fascism has always previously been the BNP's model. For example during the early 1990s the BNP and its supporters carried out attacks on trade union offices (Mansfield NUM & Tower Hamlets Nalgo - now UNISON), and also carried out regular attacks on the left and the anti-racist movement.

However, the political period we are in is one of increasing trade union militancy and working-class struggle, not the series of serious defeats that workers suffered in Italy and Germany before Mussolini and Hitler were able to build serious fascist organisations.

Also, there are no serious sections of big business or the establishment that are prepared to back a neo-Nazi force at this stage. The establishment is quite aware that the use of right-wing militias against striking workers (for example against the firefighters in their dispute) could provoke a mass movement - against the militias, and also any government arrogant enough to use them.

What threat do the BNP pose today?

In the past the threat of the BNP has been partly physical and partly ideological. At the moment though, the main threat they pose is ideological: the influence that their propaganda and ideas can have on political debate and social attitudes in Britain, increasing the divisions that make it much harder for working-class people and local communities to fight back.

This is not to underestimate the threat that the BNP pose in Britain today. The BNP as populists are actually more dangerous than they were in their more openly neo-Nazi form, as they can reach and influence a much wider audience.

The way that the presence of the BNP can shift the political debate to the right has already been seen in New Labour's increasing attacks on asylum rights, and in the increased media coverage of the asylum issue (for example, The Sun's campaign earlier this year against people entering Britain illegally). Yet this only legitimises the BNP further.

Racist attacks

The level of racist attacks, and the level of attacks against asylum seekers had already been rising steadily for several years before the BNP re-appeared on the political scene. In part the BNP have merely exploited these rises. The level and nature of racist attacks, particularly in areas where the BNP has a significant active presence or councillors, need to be carefully monitored by the anti-racist and trade union movements.

Their successes in getting councillors elected (particularly because of the huge amount of media coverage they have received, making the BNP look much bigger and more powerful than they really are) has also had an effect in making racism much more accepted and respectable.

This is only helping to increase the existing divisions in communities - like Burnley and Bradford - which already have long-term problems with segregation, unemployment and poverty. Every new success for the BNP is a blow to the black and Asian community.

This is particularly the case for many black, Asian and Muslim young people who are angry at the racism they

face in Britain as well as the problems of deprivation, low pay and exploitation; and radicalised by the brutal war fought against Iraq in the interests of US and British imperialism.

To these layers the presence of the BNP or the election of BNP councillors is yet another bitter insult; a rejection of their presence in Britain and right to be accepted as equals (despite the fact that the vast majority were born and brought up here).

Without a united movement against the BNP these radical layers, who should be some of the leaders of the anti-racist movement, could instead turn towards isolationist or separatist movements, or towards some of the right wing political Islamic movements that are trying to recruit.

Other groups targeted by the BNP, like the gay, Jewish and disabled communities, feel fear and anger at their advances. Even when leading BNP members are not carrying out or encouraging others to carry out hate crimes against these communities, the presence of a party (like the BNP) which has a long history of preaching hatred and carrying out physical attacks against them is a threat.

These increases in racism, tension and division are a weapon that the BNP uses against everyone, including its own supporters. For many deprived white communities, ignored by central and local government for years, this is a crucial question. None of the problems that working-class communities face will be solved without united campaigns for better resources. Everything the BNP does helps to sabotage this.

The threat of physical violence from the BNP

Will the BNP turn back to physical violence as a general tactic? This is most likely to happen if the BNP suffer serious electoral defeats and a section of the hardcore neo-Nazi wing of the BNP turn back to their old methods in despair.

However it is also possible that the BNP leadership will be prepared to tolerate a certain amount of violence and intimidation being used by a section of members or supporters. The Flemish Bloc in Belgium and the National Front in France both use physical violence against their political opponents (for example against the left in the universities) at the same time as using more populist methods to gain support in elections.

In the meantime, every anti-racist, anti-fascist and socialist needs to get involved in the task of campaigning against the BNP as they exist today.

Campaigning against racist attacks in Walthamstow



by Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, from London ISR

The Walthamstow Guardian recently reported the tragic death of Awais Alam in Walthamstow. The police are still investigating, but many people believe it was a racist attack. If racism isn't dealt with it can increase the possibility of racist attacks and the growth of racism in general. International Socialist Resistance believes a campaign against racism of young people and trade unionists is needed in Waltham Forest.

Why are some forms of racism increasing now?

Most young people are against racism. We don't think that anyone is born a racist. Racism and prejudice are something that you learn. The people who have failed to tackle racism are the rich and powerful. Four years after the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, which exposed racism and corruption in the Metropolitan Police, police racism is getting worse not better. Figures released for the 2001 to 2002 period show that in London the Metropolitan Police stopped 40% more Asian people and 30% more black people, but 8% fewer white people.

Racist attacks do not come out of the blue but must be seen against the background increase in racism nationally over the last few years. Neo-Nazi parties like the BNP, who racist ideas publicly, have also increased their vote, winning 16 councillors in England.

Malcolm X said that you can't have capitalism without racism

Racism has long been used to divide working-class people. It suits New Labour if ordinary people are blaming other ethnic groups for inadequate services and the low standard of living. The real people to blame are the government and their big business friends who have implemented huge rises in council tax in the borough while not improving the services. This year council tax went up 19% at the same time as services were cut by 5%. This combines to form a serious attack on our education and housing as well as other services.

The social problems which allow racism to develop are mainly caused by this profit system, which puts money before people's lives. Capitalism is the cause of the inequalities and problems that we face. International Socialist Resistance is a campaigning organisation which is run by young people for young people. We fight for an end to racism and prejudice but in order to achieve that we have to fight to get rid of the capitalist system. Capitalism is a system which is run on the basis of more and more profit for a tiny rich minority. Capitalism means war and terror and death and destruction.

We want to replace that system with a system which is run democratically on the basis of need – socialism. We campaign for a social society where the wealth and resources exist are democratically planned for the benefit of all.

YRE is working with International Socialist Resistance (ISR), an anti-capitalist youth group, to campaign against the BNP and against racism.

For more info on the campaign in Walthamstow or ISR you can contact ISR through the YRE office; email **againstcapitalism@hotmail.com**; or visit their website at: **www.anticapitalism.org.uk**

Working class movements threaten the far-right in France

It is a year after the French presidential election which saw mass demonstrations on the streets of France against Le Pen, leader of the Front National (FN), a far-right nationalist party. Le Pen had got through to the second round of the presidential election. Virginie, a teacher in France who helped launch Resistance International (the group affiliated to International Socialist Resistance in France), spoke to Anna from the YRE on the effects the FN have had on French society since these elections.

What is the situation of the FN a year after the French presidential election?

The FN is not visible in France. They can not be seen campaigning on the streets. Despite the increase in people who openly say they vote for or support them.

What type of people support the FN?

The working class, particularly those who have been unemployed for many years. Many of whom used to vote for the far left, i.e. the communist party, who have become disillusioned and feel betrayed.

What effect has this had on the government's policy?

The government have threatened the ordinary people saying it is 'us or them' (the FN) in order to carry out their own right wing policies of cutting public services, social security, and pensions. The Chirac government was careful for the first month after its election at the end of May as their support in the first round was 19% - the lowest ever vote for a presidential candidate who went through to the second round.

What effect has the recent strike movement had on the FN and the support they receive? And what is the movement about?

The recent strike movement is opposing the government's plans to align public service workers pensions with the private sector. Hence to increase the number of years the public sector workers have to work from 37 _ years to 40 years. This reform's intention is intended to lead to an increase in people buying pensions in the insecure stock market whilst diminishing publicly provided pensions. The other issue leading to a strike was the proposal to decentralise education enabling schools to have responsibility for their budget etc.

The FN have been completely absent from the strikes as they are unable to publicly declare their real position. They have proposed worse measures than the government and have endorsed the government's policy. Such as increased working hours and increasing the age of entitlement for a pension from 60 to 65 years. The strikes are a big problem for the FN as a big part of their support comes from the working class who are striking, on the streets. They dare not attack the working class whilst it is able to organise and mobilise so effectively and defend its own rights and interests.

The FN is aware that a big part of their voters may not vote for them in the next election.

However none of the main parties are proposing any alternative as the Parti Socialiste [the equivalent of the Labour Party in Britain] said they favour the governments proposed pension reforms. Thus the working classes are unable to trust or rely on them.

It is crucial that the anti-fascist movement link up their campaign with the working class movement to fight for decent housing, jobs and pensions not racism.

Fighting poverty and the far right in Wakefield

A trade unionist's view

During last November/December 2002, whilst participating in Wakefield firefighters' support group, a handful of trade union activists discussed the idea of re-establishing a local trades Council. We identified the need for locally co-ordinated trade union solidarity linked to wider community campaigns, such as the campaign against the immediate threat of BNP candidates, who were standing in the area in the local Council elections.

It was also realised that a 'talking shop' would be of no use - that an active campaigning body was required to intervene on the major issues which confront working-class people. The group of about a dozen like-minded trade unionists met and the consensus was to re-form Wakefield Trades Council.

We held our first Annual General Meeting in April 2003 and the newly reconstituted Wakefield Trades Council is debating and organising how we can actively tackle the wider social issues affecting working-class people. This is not a simple task, especially considering the poverty conditions faced by a local trade union movement, which has been savaged by the complete decimation of the local coalmining industry.

Campaigning activity

We have begun a campaign against 'Brighthouse', the legalised loan shark retailers on the high street. We'll be pointing their 'customers' towards the local credit unions instead (see box).

We hope that this will be a springboard towards regular activities against debt which will directly improve the situation for many as well as gaining the Trades Council some credibility. Many Trades Council delegates are buzzing with excitement at the prospect of a body which actively and regularly intervenes in struggles in order to try to change things.

Wakefield's Labour council is trying to sell off the last of our council housing (the ballot is planned to be held by the end of this year) and to privatise or close several elderly care residential centres.

Trades Council delegates, representing unions from Unison and the GMB to the RMT and FBU, nod in agreement every time the finger of blame is pointed forcefully at the New Labour government and/or the Labour council. Delegates feel that New Labour are selling us out as workers and as trade unionists; that we are not being represented by the Labour Party any more.

Campaigning against the BNP

The British National Party have been trying to gain a base in Wakefield by standing in the recent local elections. Trades Council members turned out regularly to leaflet against the BNP in the Ossett and Horbury wards where they stood. Searchlight newspapers and the local Trades Council newsletter were distributed to most households in both wards. The BNP received 629 votes (15.5%) in Horbury and 784 votes (18.6%) in Ossett.

John Gill and I, who are both representatives at the Trades Council, were standing in our own areas in Wakefield as Socialist Alternative candidates (Socialist Party). We participated regularly in the anti-BNP campaign, but also argued that it was not enough in itself to oppose the BNP by merely exposing their neo-Nazi agenda. We pointed out that campaigns needed to be waged to combat the conditions which allow prejudice and support for the BNP to grow.

Socialist policies to answer the BNP's lies

Socialist policies like an end to privatisation, affordable homes, free education and a minimum wage you can live on provide a genuine alternative



to the problems that the BNP exploit. A socialist society, where the world's resources would be democratically planned to provide for people's needs, would abolish the power of big business and the poverty and unemployment it creates. By putting forward socialist ideas, trade unionists can expose the BNP as having no real solutions to the problems that ordinary people face today.

Plans for the future

The Trades Council will be organising and participating in direct action campaigning activities which fight injustices, improve conditions and combat the effects of global capitalism.

What trade unionists really need is to build a party that can support their interests: one that puts workers' rights and local services first and fights against privatisation. Most of us are fed up of handing over money to New Labour year after year, while they attack our members jobs and conditions.

*Mick Griffiths
Wakefield & Pontefract Hospitals
Unison branch secretary
(personal capacity)*

On Saturday 7th June Wakefield Trades Council held a day of action against credit companies targeting people who are low paid and on benefits. Members of the Trades Council demonstrated outside Brighthouse, a high street store which charges 29.9% interest on the household goods bought on its hire-purchase scheme, leafleting and petitioning passers-by.

John Gill, a spokesman for the Trades Council, said: 'Businesses like Brighthouse, Provident and Shopper Check are targeting people on part-time and low incomes, and the rates of interest they charge means that many people are getting into a debt trap simply buying essential items.'

'Once people get into debt they never seem to get out and we would like better legislation to be brought in to protect vulnerable groups. Many of Brighthouse's goods cost much more in the first place than they do in other stores and if people take out the insurance cover as well then they can end up paying a vast amount over several years for a single essential item.'

According to the Wakefield Express, Brighthouse has 112 stores across the country and approximately 1200 customers in Wakefield.

The trade unionists got an excellent response from the public. Plenty of signatures were collected, and people were directed towards the much better alternative of the local credit union.

Fighting police corruption

Interview with Gary Mills and Tony Poole

GARY MILLS and Tony Poole were released recently from prison after campaigning for 14 years to force the justice system to admit what is blatantly obvious, they were wrongly convicted of the murder of Hensley Wiltshire, a black man who died in Gloucester police custody. GARY MILLS and TONY POOLE were interviewed by CHRIS MOORE.

How has fighting your conviction changed you?

GM: I was 29 years old when I went into prison, I'm 44 now. We were determined to come out mentally stronger. I'm more tolerant of people now.

TP: I'm a lot more aware of how the system works and the world for that matter.

What were the main points of corruption in your case?

GM: There isn't one area of our case that the police, Crown Prosecution Service, the courts and eminent doctors haven't changed or tried to change. They changed the cause of death, the medical evidence, the physical evidence, the times of events - the witnesses have changed their stories countless times.

The Court of Appeal, to cover up for police officers, said there was no systemic corruption, even though they said all the evidence is false. Now they are pretending our release is based on new evidence. It's the same evidence which convicted us.

TP: The main point of corruption is police murder. But they don't treat it as a murder when it's a death in custody. They don't forensically analyse



Gary Mills (left) and Tony Poole

Photo: Chris Moore

any of the police officers' clothing and question them.

Then we go on to perjury, perverting the course of justice, officers hiding documentation and the jury never got to hear that evidence. I don't think there's ever been an officer held accountable in any way.

GM: Some of those officers in that cell with Hensley, were the same officers who investigated us for murder. One of the main corrupt officers has just retired, so has the superintendent in charge of the case. It's the same throughout these cases. People are in prison until the main officers retire or they die.

How does the system treat people who are wrongly convicted?

GM: For the first few years you're not progressing through the system, (you only progress if you admit your guilt) really you're in a no man's land. For the first year of my sentence I was moved about 14 times and I was getting into disruptions with officers because I wasn't prepared to kow-tow down to people who I thought had no right to speak to me the way they did.

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In other ways it makes you stronger, because you know in your own mind and heart that you're right. For the last seven or eight years of our sentence it was common knowledge even among staff that we were innocent.

TP: They try and wear you down to give up. But I thought the anger's got to be channelled into trying to get out. I felt I was more like a hostage.

GM: If we hadn't won that appeal we'd have been in prison for the rest of our lives (because refusal of admission of guilt means you're ineligible for release).

What is the judicial system all about?

GM: In general I've got no doubt in my mind the judicial system is about keeping the status quo, it's about keeping the rich where they are and about keeping poor working class people in their place.

What kind of changes would you like to see to the system?

GM: Police officers should not be immune to prosecution. Gloucester police murdered somebody in the police cells, and should be accountable for it. They should be accountable for their perjury, the perversion of the course of justice. And it's not just our case, this is endemic throughout the whole system.

People don't fall into prison accidentally, they go because police officers, crown prosecutors, judges and others falsify evidence and put people they knew were innocent into prison. There must be some sort of accountability.

Did the Labour government make any difference to your case?

GM: Yes it made a massive difference, because before they were in power we had dozens of Labour MPs who supported our case. But once they got in power, suddenly they forgot who we were. Their stance on law and order is more right wing than the Tories'. The division line between Labour and Conservative has gone completely

now.

TP: I'm still looking to see if anyone from Labour will stand up, it's all about pleasing the public and leading them on.

What did support from the socialist mean to you?

GM: First, without the case being highlighted by groups like the socialist we'd be talking about 24 years not 14, because we'd have never given up our fight. When you get the socialist and see an article about yourself and a few people write to you, it makes a big difference. They lift your spirits and you think I'm not on my own here. We owe a big thank you to the socialist as well.

TP: My hat goes off to those who took to the streets and campaigned, I hope more people do it.

Other cases Gary and Tony would like to highlight include Winston Silcott, Ishtaq Ahmed, Jimmy Ingram, Kenny Carter, Mark Brown and Danny Johnson (now released)

(This interview was first carried by *the socialist* on 28 June 2003).



Where Hensley Wiltshire died

Photo: Chris Moore

Asylum Feature:

Answering the myths

The biggest issue that the British National Party exploited in the May elections was asylum. Asylum seekers and refugees are often blamed for housing shortages and a lack of local services. The root of these problems is the pro-big business policies carried out first by the Tories and now by New Labour.

But New Labour, rather than changing their unpopular policies, are determined to scapegoat asylum seekers. David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, has regularly made verbal attacks against asylum seekers - like his comments in April 2002 about asylum seeker children 'swamping' schools.

Attacks on asylum rights carried out by the New Labour government have also reinforced prejudices against asylum seekers. For example, at the beginning of this year the government scrapped benefits for most people who apply for asylum after they've entered Britain (around two-thirds of all asylum seekers).

This has left many asylum seekers destitute, and may still be ruled illegal by the courts in Britain. It also encourages people to think that the meagre benefits asylum seekers receive in Britain are a major reason why they claim asylum in Britain, rather than any other country.

Lies by politicians

The government likes to pretend that policies like scrapping benefits for many asylum seekers are

the reason why asylum applications have dropped over the last few months. But, as research commissioned by the Home Office has reported, most asylum seekers don't even know what benefits exist in Britain when they make their decision to come here (see box: Understanding the decisions of asylum seekers).

In fact, one of the reasons for the drop in asylum applications recently is that the government cynically slapped a visa restriction onto people visiting Britain from Zimbabwe (see box on Zimbabwe).

However, the lie that asylum seekers come to Britain in order to claim benefits is a convenient one for New Labour. They would much rather people believe that, than have an honest discussion about the real reasons people are forced to flee their home countries.

Or about the role of the British government in supporting and arming dictatorships and repressive regimes around the world. This is because the government know that enormous sympathy still exists in Britain for people fleeing persecution and torture.

Prejudice and tension leads to violence

The long-term problems of poverty and neglect were undoubtedly the main causes of the riots in Wrexham at the end of June, but the immediate trigger for them was tension between Iraqi refugees (whose right to asylum had been recognised by the British government) who had moved into the area recently and local residents.

The Wrexham riots were made possible by the climate of prejudice against asylum seekers that New Labour, as well as the media and the far right, have encouraged. The level of physical attacks against asylum seekers has been rising, and several asylum seekers have been killed in racist attacks over the last year or more.

Can we trust the government's statistics?

New Labour have come under criticism for 'massaging' the asylum statistics to make themselves look better. There is some truth in this accusation: in Blair's pledge to reduce asylum applications by half he deliberately picked the month with the highest asylum applications as the figure that had



to be halved.

This was October 2002, where 8,900 applications were received. When Blair made the pledge, in February, the level of asylum applications had already been going down for several months.

This kind of sleight of hand is a feature of New Labour that people are growing increasingly cynical towards. We have seen it before: in NHS waiting lists and other statistics that are meant to make the government look good while hiding the real situation.

New Labour's dangerous game

But New Labour are playing a dangerous game. The more cynically they twist statistics to make themselves look good, the less they will be believed. The government's combination of attacks on asylum rights and the scapegoating of asylum-seekers for the rundown in public services that their Tory policies have caused, are feeding hostility towards asylum seekers just as much as the right-wing press.

This feature aims to puncture some of the common myths about asylum seekers and arm you with some of the arguments you will need to counter the prejudice against asylum seekers spread by New Labour and the media and exploited by the BNP.

None of the arguments against asylum seekers spread by the BNP or by the media will help save public services in Britain or solve the housing crisis. Instead, the prejudice and division that these ideas create make it much harder for local communities to unite together and fight for the services and facilities that they need.

The YRE fights for jobs, homes and services for all. We campaign to unite local communities, against the division and hatred that the big business system we live under - capitalism - creates.

Defend the right to asylum

We fight to defend asylum rights, against attacks both from the government and from the media, supporting refugees' right to asylum and support in rebuilding their lives. And we also fight against corruption, repression and war internationally, giving solidarity to movements against war, poverty and dictatorship.

The only way that the asylum crisis will ever be solved is by putting an end to the wars, repression and exploitation that force people to leave their homes. YRE fights for an end to the injustice of capitalism; for world run democratically for need not profit.

Zimbabwe

The Home Office report on asylum statistics for the first quarter of this year says that one of the reasons the proportion of initial decisions granting asylum fell from 11 percent to 7 percent was because 'fewer decisions [were] made on Zimbabwean cases'.

The biggest single drop in asylum applications - 61 percent - has been from Zimbabweans (comparing the first quarter of 2003 with the last quarter of 2002). This is not because the human rights situation has improved in Zimbabwe. It is because the British government imposed visa restrictions on travel from Zimbabwe to Britain in November last year, making it even more difficult for Zimbabweans under threat from the regime there to seek asylum in Britain.

This visa restriction was imposed a month after Amnesty International made the following serious criticisms of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe: 'a pattern of gross and systematic violations of fundamental human rights . . . Amnesty International continues to receive information indicating a pattern of arbitrary arrests, torture and intimidation, condoned or facilitated by the state. . .

'Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the continuing violence in the aftermath of the elections held on 9, 10 and 11 March 2002, especially following the departure of international election observers. The organization has received reports of attacks and abductions by militia groups against perceived supporters of the opposition in the first few weeks after the election.' This makes it clear that New Labour's so-called commitment to allow 'genuine' refugees the rights to asylum is so much hypocrisy.



How prejudice against asylum-seekers is being encouraged

Case study: Stoke-on-Trent

This material is taken from the YRE's anti-racist education pack on migration & refugees. This will be published later this year. For more information, or any comments, please contact the YRE office.

The Mail-on-Sunday

'Widow, 88 told by GP: make way for asylum seekers'

'An ailing war widow has been dropped by her doctor - so that he can treat asylum seekers instead.'

'Lydia Perry, 88, has been told that she is no longer welcome at the surgery she has attended all her life because GPs have been ordered to give priority to residents of a nearby refugee centre'

'The revelation is bound to intensify Britain's asylum crisis - and demonstrate how an influx of refugees is placing an intolerable strain on public services.'

The Mail on Sunday, 19 January 2003

The family

'The pensioner's daughter, Maureen Currell . . . said she blamed the system of having too few doctors in the city - and that was not the fault of nursing home residents, asylum seekers or individual GPs.'

'She said: "thankfully, mum has now got a new doctor in Hanley. Her old doctor, Dr Uday Pathak, was wonderful and we do not blame him.'

"'We sympathise with his plight - he has an impossibly high workload. He told us he needed to take this action because he was having to take in old folk from a home but added that he would soon have to register some asylum seekers too.'

"'This is not the fault of either the home or the asylum seekers. The real problem lies with too few doctors being trained and not enough working in the areas of highest workload.'"

The Sentinel, 20th and 21st January 2003

The health campaigner:

'In Stoke we are desperately short of GPs and we have been for a long time. Stoke is a deprived area with higher rates of ill-health: in the 1980s a World Health Organisation survey called Stoke-on-Trent "sick city" because of the high incidence of cancers, heart problems and chronic respiratory diseases. Most of these are linked to the mining industry, the steel industry and especially the pottery in, where the dust causes huge health problems.'

'In the funding system which passes extra money for healthcare from central government to deprived areas, until recently Stoke was consistently getting 3-4% below the level that it should receive. Then when asylum-seekers have been dispersed around the country, the way that the National Asylum Support Service works means that money doesn't necessarily follow individual asylum-seekers.'

'Access to basic services like healthcare is a human right and essential for asylum-seekers, who have often suffered torture and are traumatised by their experiences. But the way that NASS operates means that the funding to ensure that basic services can cope with even a small increase in demand often isn't there.'

*Ian Sym, co-ordinator of North
Staffordshire Health Watch,
January 2003*

What the YRE thinks:

With not enough resources being put into healthcare, doctors are often forced to make impossible decisions about who to treat and who not to treat, whether or not there are asylum-seekers coming into an area.

Enough resources should be put into healthcare to provide doctors and healthcare for everybody. When new patients (for example asylum-seekers or people in care homes) need to be provided for, the local healthcare system (GPs, hospitals etc) should be given extra money to make sure that no-one is left without a doctor or medical treatment that they need. Blaming asylum-seekers, or any other group of patients, won't help get more money, doctors or equipment for the health service. Communities should unite to campaign for investment in healthcare so that everyone can have a doctor and good medical care.

Often asylum-seekers are dumped in the poorest, most neglected areas, with little or no explanation about why they have come. Local people, who are already struggling to survive, can see asylum-seekers as an extra burden or as competition for the existing resources. But the problems that exist would still be here even if there was nobody claiming asylum.

Where is all the money?

There are plenty of resources in Britain: it is the fourth richest country in the world. But Britain spends less of its money on public services than many other European countries: public spending in the UK is around 38% of Gross National Product (Britain's total economic production) compared to 48% in Germany, 50% in Italy and 54% in France.

While resources and public services in Britain's poorest communities are stretched, Britain's wealthiest 1000 people own more than £108 billion in assets. Britain also has one of the biggest divides between the rich and the poor in the world. The richest 1% in Britain own almost 20% of the wealth while the bottom 50% own just 7%.



YRE is an international organisation committed to fighting fascism and racism wherever and whenever it appears. We led the successful campaign to shut down the BNP's headquarters in Welling, and to drive the BNP off their only regular "paper sale" on Brick Lane in Tower Hamlets, East London. As well as fighting against the far right, we also campaign against racism and corruption in the police and government institutions; for justice for the victims of racism and the release of prisoners framed by the police.

An important aspect of our work is to establish links with the trade unions, as the YRE sincerely believes in working class unity. We believe that it is the capitalist system we live in which causes problems like unemployment and a bad health care system. We believe that working class people of all races should unite in order to fight menaces like tuition fees or cuts in public spending.

I would like to :

- | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> set up a YRE branch | address |
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| cheque for <input type="checkbox"/> £100 <input type="checkbox"/> £50 <input type="checkbox"/> £25 <input type="checkbox"/> other: £..... | email |
| organisation | |