

**The Anti-Nazi League  
and the Struggle  
against Racism**

**Revolutionary Communist Group**  
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# The Anti-Nazi League and the Struggle against Racism

## Introduction

Black people and immigrants are facing a vicious attack. The operation of immigration controls by the British state divides families, imprisons hundreds of people and causes extreme suffering. The threat of deportation hangs heavily over immigrant workers attempting to organise to defend themselves. The immigration laws also enable the forces of the state to indiscriminately harass and intimidate all black people. Police invade homes and arrest black people on the pretext of searching for illegal immigrants. The police also use the notorious SUS laws to harass black people especially black youngsters.

At the same time the effects of the capitalist crisis fall more heavily on black people. Whilst unemployment is rising generally, it is rising far more amongst black workers. Black workers are concentrated in the worst jobs and in sectors which are particularly vulnerable to cuts in public expenditure and to rationalisations. On top of this, as the actions of the British imperialist state become more openly racist, the strength of racism in Britain increases. Thus black people are subjected to racist abuse and assaults by National Front (NF) supporters and other racists.

In the face of this attack on black people the British labour movement has revealed great weakness. The trade union bureaucracy has not attempted to mobilise the trade unions to oppose racism. They have not mobilised to support black workers attempting to organise themselves as at Grunwick's and today at Garners. Moreover, the trade unions and the Labour Party have done nothing to oppose the racist actions of the British state in particular its use of immigration controls. Indeed they have supported immigration controls. Yet the purpose of these controls is obvious. Recently Asian seamen fighting for parity of wages were removed from their ship and put into prison by the British state. Immigration controls are being used to prevent black people from defending themselves.

It is clear that if the struggle against racism is not taken up by the labour movement then the divisions that already exist will be widened. The capitalist class will find it far easier to succeed in its attacks on black workers. The whole working class will be weakened.

Black people have already shown that they will fight to defend themselves. In the course of their struggle they have shown repeatedly that they are willing to unite with

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white workers to defend all sections of the working class. The question that faces socialists is therefore how to win the labour movement to full support for the struggle to defend black workers.

There are many people who believe that the widespread support received from trade union and Labour Party leaders for the ANL represents the beginning of such a movement. The ANL, as its name implies, was set up specifically to combat the growth of the NF. But it is clear that attacks on black people are not coming only or indeed primarily from the NF. The major attack today is being carried out by the British state. It is the state that has introduced immigration controls, the state that uses its forces to harass and intimidate all black people, the state that imprisons hundreds of so-called 'illegal immigrants' in the foulest of conditions. An anti-racist movement, worthy of the name, cannot ignore these attacks but must defend black people from them. Yet the tendency exists, and is represented most clearly by the ANL, to focus only on the NF and its racist attacks on black people. The terms anti-fascist and anti-racist have come to be used almost interchangeably. To defend black people against attack from the NF is essential but represents only one small part of the work of an anti-racist movement. To defend black people today has to mean defence from the attacks by the British state.

The task of building a movement that can do this is an urgent one. But the urgency of the task should not prompt socialists to unthinkingly hail such a movement as the ANL as the beginning of an anti-racist movement. We must first decide on what political basis an anti-racist movement has to be built. The ANL must be assessed in this light — does it aid the building of a movement to fight racism?

Before we can answer these points it is necessary to understand from what source racism in Britain is gaining its strength. To kill it we must locate its roots and destroy them.

## **Imperialism and Racism**

Anti-racists often argue that racism is the child of British imperialism. Unfortunately they rarely explain the connection. It is essential that the link between racism and imperialism is understood. If this connection is grasped then the political basis for an anti-racist movement becomes crystal clear. Equally, failure to understand this connection will lead to disaster. It will lead and is leading to the building of so-called anti-racist movements that are not anti-imperialist and therefore not anti-racist.

British imperialism is a major force supporting racism and reaction throughout the world. It is one of the main props of the racist regimes in South Africa and elsewhere. There is not an oppressive regime anywhere in the world that could teach the British imperialists any new lessons in the art of oppression. In Malaya, Palestine, Kenya, Cyprus, 'British' Cameroons, 'British' Guyana, Aden, Borneo-Malaysia, and the Persian Gulf, British imperialism has practised its techniques of exploitation, oppression, torture and murder. Today it uses these tried and tested techniques against the Irish people with the utmost ferocity. The role that the British imperialist state plays throughout the world cannot be divorced from the actions it takes within this country. Just as it is a mainstay of racist regimes in South Africa and gives them vital assistance in their attack on black people, so the British

imperialist state is systematically attacking black people within this country. It would be absurd to expect the British imperialist state, a state supporting racism all over the world, to behave any differently within its own nation.

The actions of the state abroad and in this country have one purpose. They serve to protect and increase the profits of the capitalist class. This becomes clear if we examine the attitude of the capitalist state to immigration into Britain from the second world war onwards.

Throughout the post-war boom the capitalists in Britain found it necessary to restock its reserve army of labour and so actively encouraged immigration. The operation of imperialism throughout the world has systematically underdeveloped certain countries and provided capital with an international reserve army. Thus if its internal source of labour fails to provide a sufficient reserve it can call on this international source. Capital uses the reserve army to ensure that a situation of virtual full employment does not lead to too favourable a bargaining position for the working class. In Britain, immigrant labour was used to fill the worst jobs, to do shift work, to work in the worst paid jobs. The reason immigrant labour could be used in this way was that it could be discriminated against. Racism was inherent in the capitalist system during the post-war boom.

The onset of the crisis meant that the capitalists no longer needed to import their reserve army of labour. The slow-down in investment as the rate of profit fell very quickly generated over 1½ million unemployed. The reserve army of labour could now be generated internally. This found immediate recognition in the series of restrictive immigration controls which have been introduced. Today immigrant labour has the same status in Britain as it does in Germany. It is brought in to fill specific jobs on work permits and it is ejected when no longer required or at the first sign of resistance.

The capitalist state thus ensures that it will not be responsible for the maintenance of unemployed immigrant workers, or for the cost of maintaining their families and their children. Just as black workers in South Africa are employed when necessary and shipped back to barren reserves when no longer required, so will immigrant labour be treated henceforth in this country.

As the crisis intensifies the capitalists are attempting to drive down the living standards of the whole working class. Because of the specific oppression which black people suffer this attack is falling particularly heavily on them. Thus while unemployment is increasing for the whole working class, unemployment amongst black workers is increasing at a far higher rate. Unemployment amongst West Indian youth in London is running at 20%.

At the same time, the British imperialist state is intensifying the state's attack on immigrants and black people. The immigration laws have turned immigrant labour into labour without rights. Many immigrant workers are dependent on their employer for renewal of their work permit. They thus have no way of defending themselves against their employer for fear of being deported. Immigrant families are split up. The police use the immigration laws to harass and intimidate all black people resident in this country. They break into homes, detain and generally harass black people. Much of this they justify by reference to the necessity to find 'illegal immigrants'. As a result of the operation of the immigration laws there are hundreds in prison awaiting deportation. The condition of these prisoners was recently brought

to light in the case of Armley Gaol where 23 Asians were imprisoned. They were kept 6 to a cell, locked up for 23 hours a day and constantly suffered racist abuse. As well as all this, immigrants and black people face the use of SUS laws to intimidate them.

What is taking place is a systematic attempt to use immigration laws not just to regulate the inflow of labour but also to drive down the living standards of all immigrants and black people, as well as ensuring a compliant labour force for capital. The capitalists as they always do, are picking on the weakest and most vulnerable to attack first. If this attack is not met by a united working class then they will move on to attack further sections of the working class. Hence they have used every means to maintain the division in the working class which at present exists. They have cultivated and fostered racial prejudices for this purpose.

The imposition and use of immigration controls by Labour and Tory governments alike have encouraged and strengthened racism in Britain. The capitalist class and its mouthpieces in the media, the political parties and governments have said loud and clear that black people and immigrants represent a burden, a threat to this country. Racism is a weapon beloved by British imperialism and today it is using it to divide and weaken the whole working class.

During the boom the capitalists could passively rely on racism to enable them to channel black workers into the worst jobs. Today that is not enough. They have launched an intense attack on black people and they must strengthen racism to ensure that this attack is successful.

An inevitable offshoot of this process has been the strengthening of organisations like the NF. They have taken racism to its logical conclusion in arguing for repatriation. But they are not the cause of the growth of racism in Britain. It is the British imperialist state that is responsible for encouraging and perpetuating racism today. It is the state which is attacking black people in an organised and systematic fashion. The British state, not the NF, is the most significant openly racist force in Britain today. Those who cannot see that are suffering from a dangerous blindness.

The operation of immigration controls is a direct racist attack on black people. The fact that racism derives from and is used by imperialism should tell us that immigration controls in the hands of the British state will be racist immigration controls directed against the oppressed. As long as the British imperialist state exists the workers in this country must oppose all its immigration controls for they will always be used to attack and divide workers.

If the working class is to be united then a movement must be built that will defend black people from all attacks, not just from the NF but most importantly from the strongest attacker — the British imperialist state. An anti-racist movement must by definition be anti-imperialist. It must recognise the role of the British imperialist state both abroad and at home and fight it. It is inconceivable that a movement could defend those attacked by British imperialism within this country, without at the same time supporting those fighting imperialism elsewhere. Those fighting against British imperialism in Ireland are taking on the same enemy as an anti-racist movement in this country and must therefore be supported by all genuine anti-racists. Such a movement will oppose the British state's immigration laws knowing that such laws will be used against the oppressed. It must assist black people and immigrant workers attempting to defend themselves against the employers as they are doing at Garners. And it must defend black people against all forms of attack

whether from the NF or from the police and immigration officers. Does such a movement exist today? Unfortunately not. The existing leadership of the working class, the Labour Party and trade union leaders may declare themselves to be opposed to racism but their actions prove otherwise. They have supported the introduction of immigration controls. Indeed Labour governments have been enthusiastic introducers and operators of immigration controls. These leaders have done very little but express pious sentiments about the necessity to support black workers struggling to defend themselves. They have stood silently by while black workers face harassment and intimidation by the British state. The TUC has accepted immigration controls. Indeed in 1967 the TUC joined with the employers' organisation, the CBI, to oppose the extension of anti-discrimination legislation to employment in Britain. These same people have not surprisingly been the staunchest supporters of British imperialist oppression of the Irish people. Could such a gang seriously be expected to fight racism?

We have outlined on what basis an anti-racist movement must be built and have shown that it must be based on opposition to imperialism. We have said that the present leadership of the working class is incapable of fighting racism. Can the ANL begin to build this movement?

### **Can the ANL fight racism?**

The ANL regards the struggle against the NF as so urgent that it is necessary for all who oppose the NF to unite. Groups like the IMG, SWP have united with Labour Party politicians and trade union leaders and thus direct their energy to combating the NF. The ANL has ensured that a major part of what is termed the 'anti-racist' struggle is in fact limited to the fight against the NF.

Yet we have shown that the NF is neither the source of racism in Britain nor the major threat facing black people. Vicious as it undoubtedly is, compared to the British imperialist state the NF is secondary. If a movement existed capable of challenging the British imperialist state it would deal with the NF in passing.

But the ANL, far from beginning to build a movement with such qualities refuses to oppose the racism of the British state. At its first conference in July 1978 the ANL threw out the following motion:

'The ANL rejects the view that harmonious race relations can be constructed on the basis of the immigration acts'

The ANL refused to make opposition to the British state and its immigration laws part of its platform. It seems astounding at first sight that a body which claims to be anti-racist should take such a position. Perhaps the delegates didn't understand the motion, you might think. Oh but they did! For they also passed a motion which while opposing immigration controls refused to make this part of the ANL's platform. So, an organisation which says it is fighting racism refuses to oppose immigration controls. It knows full well that they are being used to attack black people and knows full well the suffering and hardship which they cause. They even say this in their leaflets — but not to oppose immigration controls but to reassure

white workers! Thus in a leaflet: 'Don't be conned by National Front lies', the ANL sets out to nail NF 'Lie Number Two':

'They say the country is being "flooded" with coloured immigrants'

But the ANL is quick to offer comfort:

'But for every 100 white people in Britain there are only *three* black people. The white immigrants from Australia, Canada, New Zealand etc are three times as many as those from India, Bangladesh, Ceylon etc. Wives and children of Asians and West Indians living here cannot get in because the rules are now so strict. For example in 1977 four out of every 10 applications from wives and children in Bangladesh were *refused*.' (Emphasis as in original)

Now just who is this meant to reassure? If the ANL was using these facts to expose the racist nature of immigration controls and win workers to oppose them no doubt blacks and immigrants would feel relieved that at last such a campaign to defend them was beginning. But remember, these facts are being used by an organisation which refuses to oppose immigration controls. So who, we repeat, is this meant to reassure? Clearly it is meant to tell white workers that are being influenced by the NF not to worry, don't vote NF, controls are already strict enough. Many commentators have congratulated the ANL on its novel and imaginative use of tactics. None could be more so than this attempt by the ANL to fight racism with racism.

By refusing to oppose immigration controls the ANL has very clearly said that it will not fight racism. It is not surprising to find that some of the labour movement's more well known supporters of immigration controls are sponsors of the ANL. Sid Bidwell who signed the Select Committee report calling for even tighter controls on entry from the Indian subcontinent (yes even stricter than the controls described in the ANL leaflet quoted above) is a sponsor of the ANL. Less well known is the fact that SOGAT, now a sponsor of the ANL, in 1971 produced a pamphlet with the title 'Stop racialism and immigration'.

How can such a movement combat racism and defend black people? The ANL says it is willing to tackle the relatively minute forces of the NF but it is not willing to defend black people against their strongest attacker — the British state.

Not only does the ANL refuse to fight the state's racism, it actively diverts attention from it. The ANL has ensured that the term racism has become synonymous with the NF alone. We have seen the ANL refuses to expose and oppose state racism. ANL propaganda very cleverly ignores the attack that black people are at present experiencing from the British state and instead concentrates on the attack they would face if the NF came to power. Thus in a leaflet cautioning trade unionists against supporting the NF they say:

'The Nazi NF opposes the right of people to join a trade union; at Grunwick's they said "water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets" should be used against the trade unions.' (ANL leaflet — the NF Nazis Enemies of the Trade Unions)

To hear this one would believe that the only thing the workers at Grunwick's had to fear was the day the NF came to power. It is necessary to remind the ANL that the Grunwick workers' strike was broken not by the NF but by the power of the capitalist state. *It was broken by a Labour Government using the police to prevent successful picketing and by trade union leaders who refused to cut off essential*

*services to Grunwick's*. Once again the ANL ignores the main attacker of black people and other workers and concentrates on the NF.

Just as the ANL is silent about the real source of the defeat of the Grunwick workers so it is silent about the attack on democratic rights that is taking place today. ANL propaganda has much to say about the fact that fascism would mean an end to democracy. But today a Labour Government has introduced the Criminal Trespass Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the very immigration acts that the ANL refuses to oppose. Yet the ANL is silent about *these* attacks. At the very time when the capitalist state and its Labour Government is attacking workers, the ANL appears and tells people not to worry about the attack that is taking place today but the one that might take place tomorrow. For all its alleged concern about democracy what is the ANL doing to defend the democratic rights of the immigrants awaiting deportation in British prisons? Because of the immigration laws there are up to 300 of these at any time. What is the ANL doing to defend the democratic rights of immigrant workers to organise in trade unions — an action which at present renders them liable to deportation? The ANL refuses to defend their rights. We do not believe that an organisation which is so selective about which democratic rights it chooses to support can protect any democratic rights at all, or any section of the working class.

The ANL does not just ignore the state's attacks and divert attention from them. It actively fosters illusions in the imperialist state and bourgeois democracy. The ANL has a great deal to say about the fact that the NF in power would mean concentration camps. Their propaganda is liberally sprinkled with photos of Auschwitz to prove this point. But what about the concentration camps that Britain is today operating in Ireland? There are none so blind as those who will not see. British imperialism which pioneered the use of concentration camps now uses them to imprison those Irish people who have dared to oppose British rule in Ireland. There it has established concentration camps complete with barbed wire, gun towers and guards who have shot people trying to escape. Such things are unmentionables for the ANL. For them concentration camps are things that only Nazis will use or have used. When British imperialism uses them the ANL does not even whisper its opposition. So when the state attacks blacks the ANL accepts it. When the state attacks the Irish the ANL accepts it. The ANL is clearly not only selective about which democratic rights it defends but also about who it will defend them from!

If the ANL were to express the real message in its usual punchy style it would be 'British imperialism rules OK'. And British imperialism is clearly not just OK for the ANL, it is positively desirable. So much so that they encourage patriotism to the British imperialist state.

Thus the ANL propaganda message is that the NF is un-British hence their use of the term Nazis to describe the NF. The ANL would have us believe that fascism was a peculiarly German invention and that the NF represent an attempt to introduce a foreign philosophy, alien to the British way of life. This merely blinds workers to the fact that the capitalist class of any country will turn to fascism when necessary. They have done so in the past not only in Germany but in Spain, Italy and today in Chile, and other countries in Latin America. British capitalists will also turn to fascism if they have no alternative method of defeating the working class.

But for the ANL the NF are not just un-British, they are, sin of sins, also unpatriotic:

'The NF say they are just putting Britons first. But their Britain will be just like Hitler's Germany' (ANL leaflet — What would life be like under the Nazis)

and

'They say they are just patriots. Then why does Chairman Tyndall say: "the Second World War was fought for Jewish, not British interests. Under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, Germany proved she could be a great power"' (ANL leaflet — Why you should oppose the National Front)

The ANL's use of the terms 'just patriots' and 'just putting Britons first' is instructive. For the ANL it seems, if the NF were just patriotic to British imperialism then all would be well. Every act of oppression of blacks, of the Irish and of the working class is today justified by reference to the national interest — to patriotism. The British imperialists have always used patriotism to set the workers of this country fighting workers abroad or foreign workers at home. How is the PTA justified — the National Interest. The immigration acts — the National Interest. War in Ireland — the National Interest. Those who speak of patriotism today are dragging workers to support one of the most vicious imperialist states in the world — the British state.

It is grotesque to speak of the National Front as unpatriotic. They are patriots who serve the interests of British imperialism, that is why they are associated with Loyalists in Northern Ireland, and white supremacists in South Africa. They are extreme nationalists and how does the ANL fight nationalism? With nationalism. They say ...

'German working people paid a terrible price in Hitler's Germany. And the world paid the price of the 2nd world war — with nearly 32m slaughtered, with great cities like Coventry and London devastated by bombing.' (ANL leaflet — The NF Nazis Enemies of the Trade Unions)

The ANL in line with its absentmindedness about every crime committed by the British state seems to have forgotten the firebombing of Dresden by Britain, the bombing of Hiroshima by the US and the multitude of other barbarities that all capitalist nations — not least Britain — committed during the second world war. Moreover this argument obscures the fact that the crisis of world capitalism in the 20's and 30's was resolved by national capitalist classes defeating the workers and then by a vicious inter-imperialist war. It was not German fascism which led to the second world war — both fascism and war were products of capitalism. Today the capitalists are faced with another crisis of profitability. They are attempting to resolve it at the expense of the working class. At the same time they are engaging in trade wars which are the harbinger of a further inter-imperialist military war. Those who speak of patriotism today disarm the working class in the face of the efforts which will be made by capital to draw workers into supporting their nation against the workers of other countries.

We have shown that the fight against racism can only be conducted successfully from an anti-imperialist standpoint. That such a fight must oppose and destroy the root of racism — the British imperialist state. This the ANL refuses to do. It supports imperialism, it is patriotic, it refuses to oppose immigration controls. It refuses to defend those oppressed and attacked by the British imperialist state. It

follows that the ANL cannot fight racism. It therefore cannot even combat the growth of the NF, since the latter's strength derives from the racism of the British state.

If it does not do these things, one might ask what is the purpose of the ANL? It has a clear purpose. That is to contain racism within a bourgeois democratic framework. To prevent support for racism from upsetting the bourgeois democratic apple cart by taking the form of support for 'extremism' — the NF. The bourgeoisie recognises that the NF is a potential threat to its stability today since it forces blacks to organise to defend themselves and in the past confrontation with the NF took on a dangerous character — fights with the police. The bourgeoisie is at present not sympathetic to the National Front, which explains why sections of all parties have supported the ANL. After all, the capitalists are quite satisfied with the attack which a Labour government is mounting on the working class. They certainly do not need fascism yet. The ANL has therefore played an extremely useful role for the capitalists. It has combatted the 'extremism' of the NF, while at the same time keeping silent about the attacks being mounted by the British state. As long as it continues to play that role, to hold racism within the bourgeois democratic framework, the bourgeoisie is content. But if the ANL steps out of line — if it gives the merest hint that it wants to fight the NF outside the bourgeois democratic framework, the capitalists become worried. Which is why they have all become so flustered by the threats to pull the plugs out on the NF television appearance. By and large, however, the capitalists have had little to worry about with the ANL. And for one particular section of the bourgeoisie the ANL has performed services of an invaluable nature. The services are called: *covering up for Labour's racism.*

### **Covering up for Labour's racism**

We have described the role played by the present leadership of the working class on the question of racism. They have supported the state's attack on black people through immigration controls, they have accepted the discrimination which exists in Britain against black people. Where black people have fought against this they have either sabotaged their efforts or given them minimal support under pressure. The Labour government introduced the 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act and now operates the 1971 Act enthusiastically. This Labour government has presided over a particularly intense attack on black people from the forces of the state.

The Trade Union leaders and the Labour Party have not only supported racism but as would be expected have been the most loyal defenders of the interests of British imperialism. They have not raised a voice in opposition to British imperialism's war in Ireland. Labour governments have been just as ruthless in the prosecution of wars against oppressed peoples as has any Tory government. The first post-war Labour government, the one most often pointed to as the model for what a Labour government with a majority can do, fought the most barbaric war to defeat the Malayan liberation movement. The ANL should note that one of the measures they used was concentration camps. Another was the beheading of anti-imperialists. As we have said, today the Labour government fights ruthlessly against the nationalist movement in Ireland, using murder, torture, the wrecking of homes, and concentration camps. It is not to be wondered that oppressed peoples throughout the world



have never had any cause to distinguish between Labour and Tory governments. As, ZAPU put it:

'... in a nutshell it means that as far as we are concerned successive Labour governments have been our enemies just as have successive Conservative governments. Imperialists never change.' (Newsline 29.8.78)

The leadership of the working class at present is 100% loyal to British imperialism. It is loyal for a very good reason. It owes its privileged existence to the oppression of peoples throughout the world by British imperialism. The role it plays is only required in a bourgeois democracy. Under this form of capitalist rule the bourgeoisie requires a layer of society whose job it is to persuade the working class that its interests lie with capitalism. Today's Trade Union and Labour Party leaders play that role. And bourgeois democracy, which is their bread and butter, is dependent on British imperialist super-profits. For it is only on the basis of those super-profits that the capitalists can afford to let slip the crumbs with which they can create sufficient stability to contain the struggles and aspirations of the working class. A large proportion of these crumbs goes to those who have the job of convincing the working class not to struggle against capitalism.

It is this that gives the leadership of the working class its particular standpoint. It supports imperialism, it supports the needs of capital at all times and it is terrified lest it loses its role in society. If it loses control of the struggle of the working class, then the capitalists will dispense with its services. That is, if the capitalists, with the help of the labour aristocracy, cannot inflict sufficient defeats on the working class within bourgeois democracy, they will be forced to turn to fascism and will no longer need the services of this aristocracy. The labour aristocracy has to walk a tightrope in order to retain its job in society. It must contain the struggles of the working class without losing control over them and it must serve imperialism without appearing to do so openly.

It is the standpoint of these people that the ANL represents. It has received support from 10 national trade unions and many Labour Party politicians including now a Cabinet Minister — Benn. The ANL is tailor-made to receive their support. We have shown that it does not oppose imperialism. It encourages patriotism to the British imperialist state. It is silent on the oppression of the Irish people. It does not defend the oppressed — the blacks — from racist attacks by the state. It encourages illusions in bourgeois democracy. It makes a total and complete separation between imperialism and the rise of racism and fascism. This allows the pro-imperialists like Benn and Bidwell to posture as anti-racists. This separation also turns the eyes of the working class away from the fact that the threat of fascism will come from the capitalist class.

No doubt the aristocracy of labour is worried by the prospect of fascism. They know their counterparts in Germany, despite their gallant services to the capitalist class, were destroyed by fascism. Fascism terrorises the working class into submission, destroys all their organisations. A fascist Britain would not require the services of the Benns and Bidwells.

But that does not explain why they have supported the ANL. Fascism is not an immediate threat today. These leaders are practical politicians and they support the ANL for very practical reasons. At the very moment when the Labour government is standing revealed as pro-imperialist throughout the world for its role in Ireland and

Southern Africa, at the very moment when it is attacking black people, along comes the ANL. It was like manna from heaven for the Benns and Bidwells and for any Labour Party or trade union leader with some left/anti-racist credentials to retain. It enables them to posture as anti-racists and restore their tattered image in that sphere, an image that is tattered by their support for the state's attack on black people. Those supporters of immigration controls can now stand up and talk to their heart's content about 'driving the Nazi racists into gutters' and all the cheap rhetoric that goes with this campaign.

These people have done nothing to prevent the attack on black workers. They have supported the racist British state to the hilt. They have more than anyone else, more than Thatcher, more than the NF, been responsible for strengthening the division between black and white workers. Take SOGAT — now a sponsor of the ANL. In its pamphlet 'Stop Racism and Immigration' it says:

'... a continuous deterioration of living conditions with unplanned immigration, can only increase antagonisms.'

In fact it is such arguments which have strengthened the antagonisms between black and white workers. Not many workers listen when the NF speaks, not many listen a great deal to Thatcher. But they do listen to the Labour Party and trade union leaders, and the message they hear is a racist one.

The ANL gives Labour racists the chance to posture as anti-racists. More than that it gives them a chance to cover up the racist attacks being carried out by this Labour government. It encourages the belief that racism is peculiar to the NF. When in fact racism, as we have shown, is the stock in trade of the leadership of the working class. Their stinking record of racism is covered up for them.

It also performs another practical service for them. We have seen at the TUC conference how anxious they are to get a Labour government re-elected. In the marginal constituencies the NF represents a threat because it generally wins votes from Labour. So the ANL enables them to say (as we have shown they do say) 'don't vote NF, controls are strict enough'. This explains why the form of ANL propaganda is primarily directed not to the question of racism but to pointing out that the NF is not just an ordinary racist party (like the LP) but is a NAZI party. By this means the Labour Party politicians hope to win back the votes of the racists.

We have shown that the ANL serves the bourgeoisie and the labour aristocracy very well. Why then is the left, the SWP, the IMG, the CPGB and the NCP involved? What has their role been? Faced with such a successful campaign, one that has attracted national support, the left has fallen over itself to prevent anything, especially the question of defending blacks against the British state, from disrupting the unity of the ANL. At the beginning of this pamphlet we reported that at its conference the ANL voted against including the demand to end immigration controls as part of its platform. The extraordinary fact is that at that conference the majority of delegates were from left groups. They decided that to include opposition to the British state in its platform would drive away the support of the Labour racists. The CPGB, which has repeatedly said that it supports the right of the British imperialist state to have immigration controls but wishes that they could be directed against all workers regardless of colour, was in no doubt of the debt it owed to the SWP:

'The recognition by the SWP, probably the group with the most members at the conference,

that it would have been disastrous for the unity of the ANL to include the no immigration controls position in the ANL platform is an important and welcome advance for this party.' (*Morning Star* 17.7.78)

What a tribute! Praise be to the SWP, says the CP, that they are not fighting for the only position that will defend black workers. Or as SWP member Paul Holborrow put it at that conference:

'The ANL is too important to drive back into the strait jacket the majority of us have come from.'

Too important for whom? It does not defend black people, so clearly not too important for them. It does not put forward the only position that will defend the working class. So clearly not too important for them. Who is it too important for? The left will say 'the mass movement'. The left in its stupid, grasping wish to create a mass movement without consideration for the basis of that movement, has become a tool, a plaything in the hands of the Labour racists. The Labour Party politicians say 'not a word about immigration controls or Labour's racism or we will desert you'. And the left obligingly seals its lips. It builds a fine platform on to which the Benns etc can step and spout.

Unity is indeed an essential for the working class. But it must be unity to defend the oppressed not unity to cover up for the oppressor. The unity of the ANL is the latter — a cover for British imperialism and its servants in the Labour and trade union leadership.

## **END ALL IMMIGRATION CONTROLS!**

Maxine Williams

**Revolutionary Communist Group  
September 1978**

## **POSTSCRIPT**

On September 24th the real nature and purpose of the ANL was revealed for all to see. While the National Front marched under massive police protection through the East End of London, the ANL mobilised 80,000 people on the other side of London to listen to speeches by amongst others, Benn, a Cabinet minister in the present racist Labour Government.

In the two weeks before September 24th, after it had become known that the NF was to march through the East End, the Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee made repeated requests to the ANL to divert its Carnival to the East End in order to defend the area. The ANL *refused* to do so. Aware of the fact that this refusal to defend the black people of the East End might cause its supporters to question the nature of the ANL, the ANL organisers claimed that they would both defend Brick Lane and continue with Carnival 2. On September 24th this was revealed as a blatant and cynical lie. It became clear to the few hundred people assembled in Brick Lane that no such arrangement had even been attempted by the ANL. The ANL abandoned the black people of the East End, and, in particular, those people assembled to defend Brick Lane, to the assaults of the police. Indeed so determined was the ANL to ensure that its supporters did not go to the East End that Ernie Roberts (Treasurer of the ANL) announced from the platform in Hyde Park that 7000 were assembled to defend Brick Lane. At the time he said this there were in fact about 700.

In this pamphlet we said that only a movement that was anti-imperialist and therefore prepared to confront the racist British state and its political servants, could fight racism and defend black people. We said that the ANL, far from being such a movement, failed to confront the racism of the British state and in fact provided a cover for the racist Labour and trade union leadership. The ANL's scabbing on the black people of the East End demonstrates this in the clearest possible manner.

On September 24 reality taught a harsh political lesson to those who believed that the ANL was capable of fighting racism. They saw that in practice this was not the case. It is now necessary to understand the political consequences of this. For the real lesson of September 24th is that an anti racist movement will not be built in or through or with the ANL. The movement that is needed will only be built in *opposition* to the ANL.

There are those who, though disturbed by the actions of the ANL, will draw back from such a sharp conclusion. They will say 'Surely to draw such a conclusion will divide the anti racist movement'. In one sense they are correct. Such a conclusion is divisive — it divides the real anti racists from the fake anti racists. To be afraid of making that distinction is to play into the hands of those who abuse the wish of anti racists to build a united movement.

Unity has become a much abused term. In this pamphlet we showed that the left, the SWP, IMG etc had refused to fight to commit the ANL to opposition to immigration controls. They justified this refusal to fight the racism of the British state on the grounds of preserving the unity of the ANL at all costs. The unity they sought to preserve was not the unity of the oppressed and exploited against their enemies but unity with the staunchest supporters of the British imperialist state — the racist Labour and trade union leadership. For the IMG, SWP, unity with the



Benns and Bidwells was the altar on which the interests of black people were sacrificed. Just as they refused to disturb the unity of the ANL by fighting for opposition to immigration controls, so the SWP, IMG, supported and justified the ANL's scabbing on September 24th by reference to ... unity!

Arguing for the ANL's decision to proceed with the Carnival, P Holborrow, Secretary of the ANL and SWP member, wrote:

'A common purpose and a united strategy will ensure that the Nazis do not succeed. Defend Brick Lane—the Carnival goes on'. (*Socialist Worker* 23.9.78)

And after September 24th when it became clear that the ANL's 'united strategy' had been to scab on the black community of the East End, how then did the SWP justify its support of this? In an article called predictably 'STILL UNITED', Tony Cliff wrote that the SWP could have mobilised 40,000 for Brick Lane but:

'The result would have been 1) The disintegration of the ANL 2) The realisation that even such a movement on the empty streets of the City of London facing 8,000 police might not have broken through and beaten the Nazi marchers'. (*Socialist Worker* 30.9.78)

The SWP recognises that to defend black people from the NF inevitably involves a confrontation with the forces of the British state. Just as clearly they recognise that such a confrontation would lead to 'the disintegration of the ANL', driving away the Benns etc whose loyalty to the British state has been demonstrated time and time again. Just as on the issue of immigration controls, the SWP abandons the interests of black people and the working class as a whole in order to preserve unity with those who have supported the state's attack on black people to the hilt.

The IMG shows the same preference for 'unity' as against defending black people. In an article called 'Were we right to go to Brixton—Yes Yes Yes' they write:

'But the question facing the ANL was not one of mobilising 50,000 anti fascists against the NF march, it was whether the ANL was prepared to do battle with 5,000 police and the Special Patrol Group on duty to guard the NF march.' (*Socialist Challenge* 28.9.78)

To have done so would evidently have:

'Actually impeded the building of a mass movement against racism in this country'. (*Socialist Challenge* 28.9.78)

It is a strange fact that, for the IMG, to fight for opposition to immigration controls, to confront the police, in fact to confront the British state in any sense whatever, always seems to 'impede' the building of an anti racist movement. God forbid, says the IMG, that we should confront the source of all racism and the protector of all racists — the British state. How can such peculiar logic be explained? The answer is given in an editorial in *Socialist Challenge* the week before Carnival 2.

'It needed not just Rock against Racism but also the united front with social democrats in order to get the ANL where it is at the moment. After all, the fact that a Labour Cabinet minister and a major trade union leader are speaking at Hyde Park this Sunday is not an unimportant fact.' (*Socialist Challenge* 21.9.78)

Had the IMG uttered those words on September 24th their meaning would have been even clearer, if that is possible. It did indeed need the British left to unite with the Benns and the Bidwells in order to get the ANL where it was on that day — on the opposite side of London to that on which black people were being assaulted by the police.

The British state is today stepping up its attacks on immigrants and on all black people. Those sham socialists, who fail to wage war against the racist leaders of the Labour Party and Trade Unions who actively work to prevent the working class from uniting to defend the oppressed, inevitably end up in the camp of the oppressors. That is the content of the left's unity with the social democrats — unity *against* black people. In case there should be any doubt left about this it is necessary to quote *Socialist Challenge*. After the Carnival, after the ANL had scabbed, *Socialist Challenge* attacked ... who? Benn? Bidwell? Of course not! They attacked the Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee.

'Already some of the spokespersons of the Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee have called for a state ban on the NF march. This goes hand in hand with a call to divert the whole carnival — a gigantic substitution for the fact that the Asian community in the East End itself, despite the progress that has been made, is not yet committed to defending itself with the support of anti racists and the labour movement at large. (*Socialist Challenge* leaflet 'Unity for Mass Action Only Way to Build Self Defence')

The IMG remembers from some far-flung region of its brain a Leninist principle about the bourgeois state — when such a principle can be used as a snide attack on the Defence Committee. But when it comes to its own practice every principle is thrown to the winds and it says to the black people of the East End who *have suffered savage police reprisals as a result of their determination to defend themselves*. 'Look after yourselves — we have bigger fish to fry'.

Black people and all anti racists have received a warning about the future actions of the SWP, IMG etc. It is not a warning which comes in isolation. The radical left has ten years of practice in scabbing on the struggles of the oppressed. For the last ten years the might of the British imperialist state has been unleashed against the Irish people. In those ten years the radical left has not only failed to build a solidarity movement but it has devoted the major part of its energies to attacking and slandering the leading force in the Irish liberation struggle — the Republican movement. The radical left has shown, first on the Irish question and now on the question of racism that it will attack the oppressed and not the oppressor — the British state. It will do so under cover of what has now become its favourite slogan — unity. The events of September 24th tell us that this unity is in reality a cover for the British state and its racist agents. The first step in building an anti racist movement which is capable of confronting the British state is to divide — divide those who will defend the oppressed from those who cover up for the oppressors.

**20th November 1978.**

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