

SEMINAR REPORT

**The Rise of the Extreme Right:
Lessons from Europe**

A UKREN seminar held on
06 February 2004
at
The UK Office of the European Parliament



Introduction

By Sarah Isal, UKREN Co-ordinator

BACKGROUND

Since its inception, the UK Race & Europe Network's objectives have remained to:

- Ensure that black and race equality community groups are aware of European developments in the field of race equality and anti-discrimination in order to provide added value to their work
- Ensure in turn that these community groups have a voice at European decision-making level on the same issues.

With this in mind, it seemed both timely and appropriate for UKREN to hold a seminar on the rise of the extreme right in Europe and lessons to be learnt on these alarming trends. Recent gains by the British National Party (BNP) in the UK have raised great concerns within the black and minority ethnic community, as highlighted at UKREN's first Annual General Meeting¹. The European dimension of the fight against the extreme right is highlighted by the fact that the next European elections in the UK (10 June 2004) could lead to the BNP gaining a seat in the European Parliament.

At a European level, extreme right movements have made extensive gains in the different countries. These gains have taken various forms, from Jean-Marie Le Pen who successfully reached the second round of the French presidential elections in April 2002, to extreme right parties joining coalition governments such as the Northern League and National Alliance in Italy or the Danish People's Party in Denmark. More generally, as argued by our host, Claude Moraes MEP, the impact of extreme right movements in recent years is alarming because their ideology and discourse have crept into mainstream political parties and now influence the political scene in most of these countries, as well as in the European Union policies, the best example being the debate around immigration and asylum.

It is therefore crucial to examine the nature of the extreme right's threat in its diversity and to look at the role that organisations such as UKREN can play to combat such alarming trends.

OBJECTIVES

- To hear a wide-angled view of the nature of the threat from far right racist parties in other parts of Europe.
- To discuss approaches that could be made to central and local government to encourage them in curbing actions which may or have contributed to the rise of the extreme right in the UK
- To examine how civil society in general and UK race equality NGOs in particular can organise resistance to the rise of extreme right movements in the UK

¹ At its 1st Annual General Meeting, held in July 2003, UKREN members present agreed that UKREN should examine the issue of the extreme-right and how it could contribute to existing campaigns and initiatives in place to combat this trend.

THIS REPORT

Section 1 of the report consists of contributions by our 4 speakers:

- Claude Moraes, MEP gives an overview of the impact of the extreme right on the European political scene;
- Jean-Yves Camus, Centre Européen de Recherche sur le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme (CERA), analyses the situation in France, both in relation to the rise of the extreme right movement Front National and the response to it by anti-racist organisations over the last 20 years;
- Graeme Atkinson, Searchlight Magazine & Antifa-Net, provides a schematic outline of the nature of populist movements across Europe, highlighting similarities and drawing distinctions between various parties.
- Milena Büyüm, National Assembly Against Racism, looks at the rise of the extreme right in the UK and the electoral gains of the BNP and mentions the ongoing campaign to fight the BNP, through a broad coalition of anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations.

Section 2 of the report focuses on the questions and discussion held during the seminar between speakers and participants. These were wide ranging and can be divided in the following broad themes:

- Terminology around the use of "extreme right"
- Link between anti-racism and anti-fascism
- Is the extreme right's success linked to a failure of mainstream parties?
- The anti-racism movement
- Islamophobia
- Antisemitism
- Political discourse and media
- EU enlargement and new member states
- European Parliament
- Terrorism and its impact
- Education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UKREN would like to extend its warmest thanks ClaudeMoraes, MEP for hosting the seminar, as well as the UK Office of the European Parliament, for making its office available on the day.

UKREN would also like to thank all speakers for their invaluable contributions to the seminar.

The politics of the extreme-right in the European Union

Claude Moraes MEP

From a European perspective the far-right is both a growing localised threat where they are active in towns, cities and regions across the EU, and in the way their message is being 'mainstreamed' across the EU - that is, the way in which the mainstream political parties have shifted their policies and rhetoric in response to the electoral gains and grassroots activity of the far-right.

This 'mainstreaming' effect is something which the UK Race & Europe Network (UKREN) and the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) have raised through their networks very effectively in a numbers of ways, most recently in the way that the immigration and asylum debate was being handled and in the recent French Assembly vote on articles of religious faith in schools - 'the ban on the hijab'.

As the first illustration of how far right ideas have influenced mainstream parties, I would like to cite the way in which my recent Report on Immigration, Integration, and Employment went through the European Parliament (EP). The Report was a groundbreaking move in the EP to link the issues of immigration with comprehensive integration policies for new and settled migrant communities, and the first attempt to take account of the issue of 'managed migration' and the 'positive immigration agenda' and, strengthening links with sending countries and the EU. Because of the controversy over the issues a huge amount of work is going into creating all-party consensus that migration can be, and is, a positive development and that there is a desperate need for a 'joined up approach'. In Committee, the Report was almost unanimously approved. Yet on the floor of the Plenary session in Strasbourg, the Report was narrowly adopted because of a switch in the vote by the centre-right parties in the European Parliament. The breakdown in consensus and the turn around by the majority European People's Party happened because of the proximity of the European elections. Even 'moderate' Christian Democrats could not be seen to be voting for a positive migration agenda, such is the pressure from the far-right, and the way migration is a key political issue.

In the words of one centre-right politician, even some of the most practical integration measures are "lines which could not be crossed". The reality is a 'climate of fear' within mainstream political parties even on the issue of integration, and the way the far-right continues to benefit from the fears it built around the issue - whether it is the long-established Le Pen, the Vlaams Blok controlling a major city in Belgium, the Danish People's Party directly influencing the Liberal/Conservative coalition government of Denmark or concerns that here in the UK, the BNP may win a seat in the European Parliament.

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Claude was elected MEP for London in June 1999 where he is the Labour Party spokesperson for the Employment and Social Affairs Committee and a member of the European Parliament's Citizen's Rights, Justice and Home Affairs Committee which deals with asylum, immigration, cross border terrorism and policing. He is one of the first Asian MEPs to be elected to the Parliament. Prior to becoming an MEP he was national policy officer at the TUC and for 6 years was director of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the UK's only independent organisation working on immigration, asylum and European migration policy. He has also been a CRE Commissioner and is currently on the Council at Liberty and of Toynbee Hall, an East London anti-poverty network.

It is for communities in France affected by the new French law on articles of religious faith to say how they feel about the targeting of the hijab. I can offer the view of many in the European Parliament, and the view

here in the UK from the Mayor of London and others that while a small minority may truly believe that secular values in schools might strengthen, it is clear that the biggest ethnic minority group in France feel threatened, targeted and humiliated. The absurdity of the law - for example French Sikhs who were not consulted by the Commission will have to remove the turban - a cultural as well as religious symbol, shows how little French society is willing to celebrate and value diversity which can truly strengthen society.

Le Pen on UK visit to British National Party

In a bid to come up with a common strategy for the European elections, Jean Marie Le Pen and Nick Griffin, leader of the BNP, shared a platform on 25 April in the North West of England. This meeting highlights the BNP's hopes to have an MEP in Strasbourg after the next European elections on 10 June 2004 and be part of a growing nationalist, far right coalition at EU level.

Source: Emma Brooks, "From Farce to violence as far right Le Pen shares a platform with BNP leader" *The Guardian*, 26 April 2004

From the EU point of view, there is evidence that here too there is a 'mainstreaming' effect. Fear of electoral gains, in the French example of Le Pen, or the convulsion amongst mainstream political parties in the Netherlands as a result of the Pim Fortuyn effect is being played out in reactionary policies like the recent decision in the Netherlands Parliament to deport 26,000 asylum seekers, some of whom will have lived in the country for over 10 years with children born in the Netherlands.

In the EU, the recent Race Equality Directive and Employment Directive (which includes provision against religious discrimination in employment) remain unimplemented in most member states and there is clear conflict with the spirit, if not the letter, with national laws like the new French legislation on schools. The recent press hysteria on EU free movement numbers illustrates how far we are from a positive and balanced debate on migration and race in the EU.

For the UK it is important to ensure that our strategy in tackling the BNP is a sophisticated one. It is clear that we should not exaggerate the threat of the BNP, but with proportional representation in European elections it is possible that they may get an MEP - most analysts point to the North West region. It is by no means certain that this will happen but the approach of direct action with and understanding that at national level the BNP are making gains on the migration debate often in areas with few or no asylum seekers is important. All sections of society - politicians and the media in particular - must look carefully at how they are contributing to any possible breakthrough the BNP might make through the national messages.

Finally, we hope to reinvigorate the race and migration debate in the European Parliament, and how we tackle the far-right by re-launching the All Party anti-racism Intergroup, working closely with NGOs including UKREN and ENAR.

The Anti-Racism Intergroup was co-founded by a group of Black and Ethnic Minority MEPs in July 1999, including:

- **Harlem Desir MEP (Founder of SOS Racisme, PES France)**
- **Fode Sylla MEP (GUE, NGL France)**
- **Carmen Cerderia MEP (PES, Spain)**
- **Claude Moraes MEP (PES, UK)**
- **Felechrias Uca (Green, Germany),**

and a group of 30 or so other MEPs from all parties. The all-party group will be launched in June 2004 with a programme of enquiries and campaigns beginning with the Roma situation in the Accession 10 countries joining the EU on 1 May 2004. The Intergroup has formal status in the European Parliament and has visited the UK, Spain, Austria, France and Italy in its first mandate.

The rise of the extreme-right in France and its impact on race equality

Jean-Yves Camus, Centre Européen de Recherche
sur le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme (CERA)

I have been asked to talk about the Front National, but I will also say a few words on the legislation on the so called religious signs which will be passed by the French Parliament next Tuesday which is a very important step, in my opinion, in the shaping of immigration policy and race equality in France.

The Front National (FN) in France was founded in 1972. Its first electoral breakthrough does not go back to the second ballot in the presidential election in 2002 but to the European elections back in 1984, which means that in actual fact, we have lived with a far right which polls more than 10% of the vote for some 20 years now.

The ideology of the FN is said by many to be a fascist, neo-nazi party. In my opinion this is a mistake. It is mostly a populist, xenophobic, nationalist party which draws some of its policies from the tradition of far right politics in France especially the fascist movements of the 1930s but mostly, it has broken ties with the tradition of fascism. At the beginning, within the top leadership of the party one could find people who were pro-nazi between 1930 and 1945. But most of these have died, and it has been taken over by the younger generation. Now it is more of a populist movement; so it is not helpful to the anti-racist movement today to see the ideology of the FN as being restricted to that of a fascist movement.

Another element worth mentioning is that, at the time of the General Election of 1997, 50% of the working-class vote went to the Front National, due to a failure in the policies of the Left to attract the working-class vote. This means that a significant segment of the working-class vote switched from either the communist party or socialist party or the conservative-right parties to the FN.

As soon as the FN became successful, there was resistance to it. But today, there is a growing feeling that this amounted to nothing: the day after the presidential election of 2002, we saw Le Pen with 16,9% of the vote. One could think as a result that we – the anti-racist movement - have failed over the last 20 years to block the extreme-right, but actually, if we had not done what we have, Le Pen would have certainly polled 20%.

In some respects the Left were successful in exposing the policies of the FN for what they are – xenophobic, anti-immigration, racist. This prevented the conservative right from signing some kind of alliance with the FN, which is the major issue today.

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS:
Born in 1958, Jean-Yves is a political scientist from the Centre Européen de Recherche sur le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme (CERA) in Paris. His academic background includes diplomas at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Institute of Political Science), Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (graduated in contemporary history) and Université Paris-I (graduated in Political Science). He is also an associate at the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Anti-Semitism and Racism, Tel Aviv University.

We will have regional elections on 21st–8th March 2004. If the FN secures between 15 and 20% of the votes in some areas of the country, will the conservative right reach an agreement with the FN in order to rule the regions (which is intermediate between the city council level and the national level)?

Obviously the FN today is not a temporary phenomenon. It is here to stay because the sociology of its constituency is very diverse, between 30–35 and 50% of the working-class votes go to the FN, but we also have a growing number of people from the middle class and even from the upper class who will vote for the FN; as well as up to 50% of unemployed people.

So what in my opinion went wrong in the political situation in France which led to the FN becoming so strong? Certainly the first issue is the fact that 40 years ago France was a 95–98 percent Roman Catholic “white” country. The immigrants (mostly from North Africa), weren’t citizens at this time, couldn’t vote. France was a very conservative society which has of course changed to a multicultural, multi-ethnic, religiously diverse society, and the main problem today, which is directly related to the issue of the coming legislation on the Muslim hijab, is that there is a difficulty within French society with Islam itself, with the perspective that Islam is here to stay as a component of French identity. Those who repudiate that vote for the FN, but it should always be remembered that at least part of the conservative party was at one time or another of the same opinion as the FN in that it rejects the possibility of Islam being assimilated into French society.

Opposition to Islam or the multi-cultural society is not only a problem for the FN, it is more widespread, and not only within the conservative party, but, in my opinion, this concern is also shared to some extent by some people within the socialist party itself. The French Left have the same concerns about asylum and immigration too. An example of this is Michel Rocard (the French Prime Minister in Mitterrand’s socialist government) saying in 1988: “La France ne peut pas accueillir toute la misère du monde” [France cannot welcome all the misery of this world]. It clearly meant that he wanted to restrict immigration, especially from the Muslim and Far East countries. This tells you how xenophobia and racism is the policy not only of the FN; it goes far wider.

Today the opinion surveys forecast that the FN will probably poll 16-18% for the Far Right in the next election – a big concern. I’d say it will poll more in some areas –certainly over 20%. In this respect the big issue is the law on religious signs in public life.

The problem over religious signs in public life – schools, hospitals, civil service – is certainly a big gain for the FN. Even though legislation says that people will not be allowed to wear any kind of religious sign, be it the headscarf, the Jewish skullcap or prominent crucifixes – it is seen by only some as discriminatory rather than as just an imposition of the French civil state. 80% of the public apparently support this new law – they see Islam as a danger. This is not a law that is designed to enforce the French ideology of a secular state, but clearly a discriminatory law, not only against Muslim women who wear the hijab, it is discriminatory against Muslims, including those who don’t practise their religion. Since 9/11 there is a big wave of Islamophobia all over France; Muslim cemeteries are being desecrated in greater numbers than before; more attacks on mosques; and so far the reaction of the government has not been what it should be.

How did the FN fare at the March 2004 Regional Elections in France?

The FN did not win in any of the 22 regions, following the 2nd round of the French regional elections on 28 March 2004. This did not really come as a surprise. However, the fact that the FN could go on to compete in the second round of the election in 17 regions out of 22 – meaning that they secured more than 10% of the votes in these regions after the 1st round – proves that the FN is well implanted in the French political scene. Le Pen’s party represented 12.55% of the total votes in the second round and 14.7% in the first round.

Source: Eric Aeschmann “Le grand coup de balai regional” *Liberation*, 29-03-04 & Cahier Résultats, *Le Monde*, 23-03-04

This is the situation in France today. Unfortunately since 2000/2001, the French anti-racist movement has become divided over support for Palestine or for Israel's right to exist as an independent state. This is really a very important issue. The consequence is that anti-racist organisations which were able to fight together against the FN in 1980-2000 in the anti-racist movement in France now no longer speak to each other. The unity of the anti-racist movement is totally broken and the hijab legislation makes it worse. It would take hours to talk about the history and policy of the FN but I hope that this provides a sufficient starting point for our discussion today.

Right-wing populism in Europe

Graeme Atkinson, Searchlight Magazine

Across Western Europe, there has been a development of right-wing populism and right-wing populist parties in the past 10-15 years. If we look at the development of right-wing populism, in a number of countries, the growth of this kind of phenomenon has been sufficient to stand out and, also, to project the organisations which represent populist politics into parliamentary institutions at various levels.

Schematically, one can say that this impact has occurred in Austria, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland and a broad overview of this tendency might be useful.

In Austria, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland, these parties sit - as junior partners - in right-wing coalition governments. In Denmark and Portugal, right-wing coalition governments are heavily dependent on their support.

The parties and their most recent electoral scores in national elections have been:

- Austria - Freedom Party - 10.2% (although that marked a big defeat for them because in the previous elections in Austria they had scored 27%);
- Belgium - Vlaams Blok - 11.6% (this result occurred at a national scale although one must remember that the Vlaams Blok is a Flemish nationalist party and that Belgium is a linguistically divided country);
- Italy - Alleanza Nazionale - 12%;
- Denmark - Danish People's Party - 12%;
- Holland - List Pim Fortuyn - 19%;
- Norway - Progress Party - expected to get 17%;
- Portugal - Popular Party - 8.75%;
- Switzerland - Swiss People's Party - 28%.

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Graeme Atkinson is European Editor of *Searchlight* magazine and coordinator of Antifa-Net and is based in Berlin. He was employed as a Special Investigator for the European Parliament's Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia in Europe (1990) and was co-author of the Parliament's official report. He has worked in newspapers and TV and has researched several hard-hitting documentaries on the themes of racism, antisemitism and fascism, including the internationally acclaimed and award-winning Swedish TV film *Wahrheit macht frei*. Graeme has worked with *Searchlight* since its inception in magazine format in 1974 and is regarded as one of Europe's best-informed reporters on neo-nazism.

It would be very tempting to throw all these organisations in the same pot, then to get a label and slap this label on the pot and the label would read "far right". But I think it would be very dangerous to do that. We must differentiate between these political forces, which we can properly put under the heading of right-wing populism.

The Vlaams Blok (VB) is a party that transformed itself from a violent paramilitary organisation which ran riots in the streets of Belgium in early 1980s and which gathered such huge accumulations of firearms and other weaponry that, by the mid-1980s, it was outlawed. It is, in fact, a fascist party hiding behind a "populist" strategy.

The Freedom Party (FPÖ) is a populist party with its roots deep in Hitler's NSDAP.

The Alleanza Nazionale (AN) is a populist party, which still has many fascist aspects (not least a huge chunk of its membership!) and is a direct descendant of Mussolini's Fascist Party.

These parties, in one way or another, have an organic connection with fascist or national socialist tradition. Does that mean that they are the same as the others which I mentioned earlier? I don't think so, because the other parties in the list, in contrast, have their roots within the political mainstream, mainly as disaffected fragments of conservative or liberal parties. For this reason, these parties generally do not have, and indeed actively resist, any cooperation with those parties like the VB, the FPÖ and the AN which are rooted in, or have an organic connection with, fascism.

And if one does not believe that, one just has to look at the blistering reactions of these "new" populist parties to the success of Jean-Marie Le Pen at the first round of the French presidential elections in 2002. These parties were desperate to dissociate themselves from any kind of links or association with the Front National in France.

Where the ideas and policies of all these parties converge is on two key issues:

- Immigration/asylum/Islamophobia;
- Law and order.

There is also some additional convergence on the issue of taxation because it is a central campaigning theme of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe.

The populist parties in Denmark, Holland, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland, while being right wing, are not fascist or even authoritarian parties, despite their enthusiasm for a hard line on the issues of immigration/asylum and law and order.

Leaving those issues to one side, these parties have more in common with right-wing conservatism and ultra-liberalism than with fascism and traditional right-wing extremism.

It can be safely said that they owe far more to Margaret Thatcher and Milton Friedman than to Hitler and Mussolini. On economic issues and many social issues, they are ultra-liberal, fanatical believers in a totally free market and oppose all forms of state regulation and intervention.

They are not totalitarian. Their ideology has no concept of 'masses' and is heavily centred on the 'individual'.

They are not violent and, because they see themselves as the real representatives of the mainstream, do not promote the notion of violent change. They are not anti-parliamentary or anti-'democratic'.

They are, most of all, politically opportunist and do not work from clearly defined programmes but, instead, gather up 'popular' grievances, resentments and concerns like a political vacuum cleaner. They are capable of manoeuvring within the parliamentary framework and constructing alliances with existing mainstream conservatives and liberals.

Belgian Court unmasks the discriminatory nature of the Vlaams Blok

A Belgian Court has recently outlawed three "associations" (charities) affiliated to the Vlaams Blok for being racist and therefore going against Belgian anti-racism laws. This is effectively an attack on the Vlaams Blok party itself and a public recognition by the court that it is a racist party, promoting discrimination and racial hatred. The electoral impact of this decision remains to be seen as the party is well grounded in part of the country, but the importance of such a decision should not be undermined and can be seen as an example of successful court action by anti-racist NGOs.
Source: "Comment affaiblir le Blok", *La Libre Belgique*. 22-04-04

They seek to capitalise on the popular belief and the growing political reality that all the mainstream parties look and smell the same and the fact that voter participation in elections is falling everywhere in western Europe. As the democratic deficit grows, the voting behaviour of those who continue to participate in the electoral process becomes more volatile.

They are generally not ideologically racist even though they are happy to manipulate and instrumentalise so-called 'popular racism'. They are all anti-Muslim, but antisemitism – the VB and FPÖ excepted – is a total taboo.

And it has to be said that the anti-Islamic approach that they have – and which is then integrated into their view on immigration and asylum – predates 11 September. There is a deep-rooted problem of cultural discrimination and a refusal to accept fully the implications of a multi-ethnic, multicultural society. In that sense, these populist parties gravitate towards this popular racism, without being ideologically racist.

The rise of this kind of populist politics has two key consequences:

- It pushes an already rightwards-moving mainstream political axis still further to the right;
- It legitimises and makes respectable the racist propaganda of those on the right of them, namely the fascists and Nazis.

These forces are hard to combat because they have shown themselves able to invade and conquer the political space and social base that formerly belonged to the traditional left, especially social democracy.

As the social democrats have abandoned the working class and lower middle class, the populists have attempted to move in and fill the vacuum.

In doing this, they attempt to address themselves to the fears and worries of 'ordinary' people. So far, the left has not devised any answer. When support for the populists falls, it is the traditional right that profits and not the left.

The anti-fascist and anti-racist movements would be making a catastrophic error if right-wing populism in its present manifestation were to get confused in any way with fascism and nazism. We have to fight to expose right-wing populism on its own territory. Attempting to label it 'nazi' or 'fascist' will only discredit us.

The differences between 'similar' political tendencies are often as important as the similarities.

Extreme-right in the UK: What strategies to fight the rise of the BNP? Milena Büyüm, National Assembly Against Racism

I would like to start by reiterating that we have to be equally concerned about fighting racism and fighting fascism: to me these issues are interlinked and it is important that we address them with equal commitment.

The government hasn't pursued social progress since its election, and there has been no positive agenda on race between the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and now. And it's become worse since David Blunkett became Home Secretary. Recently we have seen:

- Five pieces of major legislation on asylum and immigration – each further eroding asylum rights and helping create a negative climate around the issue. No other area of policy is as legislated as asylum and immigration
- The “Secret Policeman” documentary on the BBC 5 years on from the Lawrence Inquiry highlighted how very little has changed in real terms in relation to racism within the police
- The Rocky Bennett Inquiry shows that institutional racism is also very much present in the health service.

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS:

Founding member of the National Assembly Against Racism and Vice-Chair since 1999, Milena lived and campaigned in France between 1987 and 1992. She has also been actively involved in the trade-union movement as member of college lecturers union NATFHE between 1994 and 1998, including on its National Executive Committee between 1997 and 1998 as black members representative and as a member of UNISON since 1998.

But we are still better off in Britain than in other European countries. We have an organised Black community, a community that votes! Voting rights do make a difference to the political power exercised by black communities and where they don't exist, fascism has been able to influence the mainstream political parties in ways it is more difficult for them to achieve in Britain. Lessons from Europe must be learned here – we must prevent the British National Party (BNP) from gaining any more seats as it has in Burnley.

“In October 2003, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust sponsored Searchlight Educational Trust and Vision 21 to examine voting behaviour in three Northern towns where the far right had gained a foothold.

[...] The [...] report on voter preferences in Burnley, Oldham and Calderdale will make uncomfortable reading for some. Among other key findings, it reveals that the British National Party is attracting voters, particularly young men, through effective grassroots campaigning, and the other parties are failing to rise to this challenge on the doorstep.”

Source: Vision 21 and Searchlight Educational Trust (2004), 539 voters' views, a voting behaviour study in three northern towns, The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, p.9

In 2003, the BNP contested 218 seats. It has increased its representation from being just in Burnley.

It has had a 20% share of the vote in by-elections: it won a seat in Thurrock, and even if it lost the rest, its share is increasing. The BNP has changed its tactics and image – from “bully boys in boots to graduates in suits”. The BNP has accelerated its movement in some directions, as in France – it has learned from Le Pen. In fact Nick Griffin and Le Pen have been collaborating on organising for the June 2004 European elections.

If the BNP is capable of gaining a seat in the forthcoming European and London Assembly elections, they will immediately be propelled onto

the national political platform. Breakthroughs in the European elections will lead to their funding being doubled, it would be the beginning of major problem for Britain This is a major threat for us.

Britain's voting pattern at the European Elections

A MORI poll published by the Electoral Commission in March 2004 showed that only 18% of respondents thought themselves certain to vote at the next European elections in June 2004. This is even lower than the turnout for the last European elections of 1999 which was already a low 24%. Compared to the EU average of 49%, the UK is far behind Spain (59%), Italy (70%), France (52%) and Belgium (90%).

Source: Peter Preston, "Stop your whining and start voting", *The Guardian*, 29-03-04

Parties like the BNP benefit from voter apathy. In the forthcoming Euro elections, the BNP need only around 100,000 votes in the North West out of 5 million votes to get a seat in the European parliament if the turnout is around 18%. Looking at last elections in 1999, the turnout in the North West was just over 19%. On that basis, the BNP would only need 100,000 votes to get a seat, which is possible. That would represent about 8% of the vote. The situation is therefore extremely serious. Remember that a seat in the European Parliament would provide the BNP with funding from Europe and a legitimate platform from which to spout their racist views. We need to get people to come out and vote in order to stop this.

In London there is a threat to the London Assembly (5% of the vote would get the BNP a seat in the London Assembly; 8% would get them 2 seats). This is equivalent to the threat that an MEP poses: if London government has a BNP member represented in London, it is easy to imagine the impact on national politics. A BNP member in the London Assembly would mean BNP representation in the government of London, one of the most multicultural cities in Europe. The elections on 10 June will therefore set the tone for the next couple of years and for that reason we must do everything we possibly can to stop this.

What are we doing about this threat?

Unite Against Fascism is the first united anti-fascist organisation in this country in the last 20 – 30 years. It was launched this week [February 2004] and brings together the CRE, Mayor of London, trade unions, over 80 MPs from different parties as well as various celebrities. Communities have also signed up to it. It is a real opportunity to counter this threat. It has active support of Searchlight magazine.

It is going to be a massive task but in the next 2 months, we should:

- Raise awareness of the danger we face among those who are not yet alert by pointing it out, increasing voter participation by about 10 – 20 %;
- There will be Postal ballots in North West, East Midlands, Yorkshire etc. It very important to target those areas. We are holding a major national rally on 25 February, with a number of local and regional events in the next couple of months during March and April around the country to galvanise and create support.

Questions and Discussion with the audience

A question and discussion session took place after each of the speakers' presentations. However, due to the wide range of the discussion, we are presenting it in a schematic way, rather than after the transcript of each speech.

TERMINOLOGY AROUND THE USE OF "EXTREME RIGHT"

Question: In the discussion on the Far Right generally, is it not unhelpful that there is confusion between the various types of right wing parties – i.e. Conservative/Ultra-Conservative/Extreme Right/Far Right/Fascist/Neo-fascist/Nazi – as they all come from different political traditions, particularly in Europe?

Claude Moraes:

In a speech it's easy to sometimes slip into it and I try very carefully not to conflate centre right or right-wing traditions with neo-nazi or fascist traditions. One of the problems in conflating these things is that very often people from the very far right tend to slip in and out of democratic politics and therefore they change their colours, which is currently happening in Italy for example. So it's often not just on our side that conflation is going on. But it is very important not to merge these things, because there are perfectly respectable centre-right and right-wing traditions in the European Parliament (EP) and everywhere else, so it is important not to just throw around the words 'far right' or 'neo-nazi' or 'fascist'. In fact those terms themselves are changing over time, and that's why we have to have a focus on campaigning – on exactly what it is it we're campaigning against. To me, far right parties are defined as completely undemocratic in the sense that they may be involved in the democratic process, but their ultimate aim is to subvert the democratic process and to be anti-democratic: that is one notion of the far right. You can fight the far right in all sorts of ways but conflation of right traditions and the far right is not helpful to anyone, and the more sophisticated we are about it the better.

Question: You talked about the distinction between populist, xenophobic parties and fascist parties – and the importance of recognising this difference in our approach, could you provide any examples on how to tackle a similar issue with one sort of party and the other?

Graeme Atkinson:

It is today much easier to deal with traditional fascist or nazi organisations because the collective memory of World War II and crimes committed by them are still not forgotten in Europe, which gives cause for hope. It has to be said that we have not yet experienced mass fascist activity in the UK. In France, the Front National is a party of masses, and its influence is pervasive. For the past three years, in Germany, there has been on average one street demonstration per week by nazis. The level of violence is unbelievable; more than 150 people have been murdered in organised fascist violence since German re-unification on 3 October 1990. With the populists, it is much harder because it involves much bigger questions of much broader policies. They have a political programme which is not so easy to knock down. There are law and order and social problems that are being addressed by populists and not by the political mainstream. The mainstream political parties have renounced the masses of ordinary people. This is unhelpful because they feel deserted.

KEY ACTION POINT FOR UKREN: CONTINUE TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT THE EXTREME-RIGHT AND IN THE UK AND IN EUROPE BY HIGHLIGHTING ITS COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSITY OF RESPONSES TO IT.

LINK BETWEEN ANTI-RACISM AND ANTI-FASCISM

Question: In relation to your stratification of the right through to fascist movements and thinking of the organisation of resistance, do you think that this stratification makes it all the more important to maintain that organic link between anti-fascist and anti-racist movements in Britain and how do we maintain and develop them?

Graeme Atkinson

I think any notion of the separation between anti-racist and anti-fascist movements is wrong because it's artificial. I am hoping that the development of the Unite against Fascism Campaign will mark a big step forward. We do need a strong campaign.

Organisations like The Anti-Nazi League are to me, not really the kind of organisations that can deal with the challenges presented at present. We cannot use the weapons of 30 years ago...they are not so effective now.

Hopefully, Unite Against Fascism will be able to bring together the entire spectrum of those who work in the anti-racist and anti-fascist movements.

We must avoid France's situation. We also have to avoid what has happened in Germany where, for 30 years, the anti-fascist movement has seen its tactics purely in terms of physical action and not in terms of winning broad support and involving masses of people. Because of that, now the nazis represent bigger numbers than the anti-fascists and the latter are not really clear on what to do.

This leads some of them to adopt very sectarian attitudes which put them outside the mainstream of political development...which is very stupid. For example, when the German government calls for an uprising of the decent citizen to stand up and oppose the nazis, it gets a big result and you have 250,000 people at a demonstration in Berlin, but you also have members of the anti-fascist groups distributing leaflets saying "why we are not here". This is crazy and we really have to avoid that.

Question: Isn't it quite contradictory to not differentiate the campaign against racists and campaign against fascists? Is that right course? People who vote BNP sincerely do not believe themselves to be fascists. In addition, why are the people in concentrated in areas as North West or Isle of Dogs the targets; wouldn't it be better to target other neighbouring communities too? What is being proposed is a short-term strategy, but collapsing racism and fascism will not work in the long term.

Milena Büyüm:

Unite Against Fascism is a targeted campaign to stop the BNP because they are going to apply a particular strategy for EU elections; that is where the threat lies. We must expose the BNP.

KEY ACTION POINT FOR UKREN: TAP INTO AND SUPPORT EXISTING CAMPAIGNS TO COMBAT THE EXTREME RIGHT IN THE UK

IS THE EXTREME RIGHT'S SUCCESS LINKED TO A FAILURE OF MAINSTREAM PARTIES?

Comment from the audience: The reason the working class vote Front National (FN) is because they have the illusion that the FN protects their working rights. The left never clarifies its position, and gives the impression of supporting established government policies of exploiting immigrant labour. That is why they are confused and vote for the FN.

Jean-Yves Camus:

One of the reasons why the working class votes for the FN is of course that they believe that the FN will give them their due rights in terms of employment and social security, etc. It is also because the socialist government we had between 1981 and 1988 and from 1997 until 2002, was not so different in terms of policies from the conservative right when it came to transferring state-owned companies to the private sector, transferring the health system to the private sector, employment policies, welfare policies etc... There was such a disappointment in the Socialists in France because voters realised that the left wing government was acting like a right wing government, and the only option left was the FN. And this means that from one election to another there is a big change in voters for the FN. Today in just one such election in April 2002 there were 4.5 million votes for Le Pen. But if we look at the results of the elections over the last 20 years, almost 10 million people have voted at least once for the FN. How many more will there be at the next election in June?

Comment from the audience: I wanted to take up the point about the concept of populism being born out of a revulsion with traditional policies that have evolved over most of the 20th century in the social democratic and Christian democratic models, and the belief that it's possible for the charismatic leader to speak directly to the people in the catchment area for a dialogue to take place on that basis. That does seem to me to be the dominant characteristic of so many of the older movements of the far right and it does explain the volatility of the political situation; these rapid waves going up and down, of Le Pen being able to challenge successes in presidential elections and, 4 weeks later, parliamentary elections being wiped out by the Pim Fortuyn list and so on. What needs to be discussed in the context of understanding the dynamic is actually the crisis of contemporary policies as well. The fact that the social democratic political parties all over Europe are retreating – they no longer have a basis for being able to have a dialogue with working-class communities, the intermediary mechanisms which existed in order to allow them to do that – i.e. trade unions, all them, civic movements, etc, that used to exist – are all in retreat. The simplicity of all this is also a criticism of mainstream politics.

Comment from the audience: It is not very realistic to argue that people should vote for any party and not the BNP. I don't consider that to be a political argument. That is a psychological argument based on voter turn out, it does not deal in any way with the conditions which gave rise to the BNP. Those conditions that the BNP has skilfully exploited were created particularly by the Labour party and other governments, particularly at a local level, i.e. in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford, where Labour using the language and rhetoric of multi-culturalism created spatial and social segregation, separatist funding, calling it celebrating diversity when it is actually creating more social division. The BNP exploited that. It isn't good enough to tell people to just not vote BNP. When the Anti-Nazi League addressed a meeting after the BNP victory in Burnley, they said that BNP voters are scum from the estates. Is this the way to persuade people to vote against the BNP? I don't think so.

Comment from the audience: Regarding issues in the Northwest of England, I understand that there is an Asian candidate standing. The BNP is saying to people: "If you don't vote Nick Griffin, you will have the Asian candidate winning". This creates a lot of political turmoil. In other areas, there is evidence that the BNP is going to communities such as the Afro-Caribbean communities, and is saying to them that the problems of social deprivation they are suffering are because of the Muslim community and the same thing to the Muslim community saying that their problems are because of the Sikh community etc... so you have members of black and minority ethnic communities actually siding with the BNP. They are playing up the prejudices of the different

communities very skilfully; that is their campaigning tool for setting communities against each other. How are we going to counteract that? We should show these communities why they are wrong and outline the reasons. We should highlight the criminal aspects of the BNP.

ANTI-RACISM MOUVEMENT

Comment from the audience: In relation to our own activities as anti-racists, we need to be developing practical policies of anti-racism, geared towards a task of changing institutions. It is not a question of a moral stand or moral exhortation for people to be on the side of angels as opposed to being on your side, it is actually to identify the key issues which exist in society. Good examples in British politics recently have been institutional racism within the police force, the health service, as well as being able to build practical politics aimed at a transformation of the public institution and public social life, in which the majority is also able to identify with the progressive nature of that process as well. To date there has been far too little of that in the form of anti-racist movements that we've all been members of for all these years. The anti-racist movement needs to focus on how to change institutions, identify the key issues and where they are – the police, the health service – and take the white majority with them.

Comment from the audience: It is important to keep the Israel/Palestine question out of the anti-racist movement. The situation in France is a disaster. Irrespective of the label you put on the FN, the left has collapsed. Decisions such as the law on religious symbols can't be openly opposed by different political groupings because they'll see it as damaging their own political positions. Much mainstreaming has seeped into French society and it is very frightening. It has already been taken up in this country and other countries like Belgium. A very important lesson is that the policy and fight against racism should be kept within its own framework of importance, otherwise it will be impossible to make it work.

Comment from the audience: It is true that the split within the French anti-racist NGO community is on the basis of the support for Israel or for the Palestinian cause but also a lot of the anti-racist NGOs are affiliated directly or indirectly to political parties and therefore this has also contributed to the difficulty for these movements to be effective and united in the fight against racism and the FN

KEY ACTION POINTS FOR UKREN:

- MAINTAIN FOCUS ON ANTI-RACISM AND NOT ON OTHER POTENTIAL DIVISIVE ISSUES (i.e. ISRAEL/PALESTINE QUESTION)
- CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON POTENTIAL INSTRUMENTS FROM EUROPE TO COMBAT RACISM (i.e. IMPLEMENTATION OF RACE & EMPLOYMENT DIRECTIVES AND ADOPTION OF COUNCIL FRAMEWORK DECISION ON COMBATING RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA)

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Question: You talk about the FN and the mainstreaming of its views in French politics; if we focus on Islamophobia, could it be argued that it has always been present in mainstream politics and goes back to a long time ago, back to the Algerian war? Worse than that, socialist parties and

others have probably propelled the FN to the state where it is today by not taking on issues of discrimination, social exclusion and racism.

Jean-Yves Camus:

Islamophobia in France does not of course go back to 1972, to the formation of the FN; it goes back to the old colonial history. Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia: these three Muslim countries were French colonies from the middle of the 19th to the mid-20th century. This has been something buried very deeply in the French national psyche until a very short time ago. You have to remember that before France left Algeria in 1962, there was an army putsch in 1961. Four army generals tried to take power in Algeria and in metropolitan France over de Gaulle. They were jailed for 10 years, and the man who acquitted them in 1983 (acquitted them of all charges 20 years later) was President Mitterrand and the Socialist Party. This indicates the complexity of the legacy of the Algerian war of independence and how it affects the French collective memory. You need to remember that more than 1 million French people were repatriated from Algeria to France in 1962, when Algeria became independent. This of course has left a scar. In some areas of the country (the Riviera and southern France as a whole), the repatriated people account for a significant part of the population. They still consider Muslim people as second-class citizens, just as they were in colonial Algeria.

Comment from the audience: I am surprised that you didn't connect the issue of Islam with the Christian ethos of Medieval Europe because it is a very important fact, this is why the French government goes into heavy secularism, and we will end up going back to the medieval Europe when all were opposed to Islam.

Graeme Atkinson:

Undoubtedly in some European countries, there is a strain of Catholic fundamentalism, "Integrationism" as it is called in France. However, I personally don't believe the issue of headscarves has anything to do with Christian fundamentalism. I think it is do with a very dogmatic misinterpretation of the outcome of the struggles between Church and State from the French revolution of 1789 onwards until the beginning of the 20th century. The question of religion from a Christian point of view has not raised its head; it does not mean that the policies that the French government is misguidedly adopting are any better, but I don't think that is the motivation behind it.

ANTISEMITISM

Question: You've talked about Islamophobia, which is a serious issue, but we also read about antisemitism and the change in the nature of antisemitism in France.

Claude Moraes:

The anti-Semitism issue is very controversial in the European Parliament, and in European race politics, the Middle East issue is central to the discourse - which is very different from the UK debate on racism and anti-Semitism.

Jean-Yves Camus:

According to the figures of the French National Commission on Human Rights, the number of antisemitic incidents was 6 times higher in 2002 than in 2001, but the overall number of racist incidents, excluding antisemitic incidents, was 4 times higher in 2002 than in 2001. The number of antisemitic incidents was between 505 and 550 in 2002 and we know from our official figures from the Jewish community for 2003 that there were about 430 recorded incidents – incidents of all kinds, from arson to people being beaten up. Antisemitism is certainly on the rise, but do not believe everything you read in newspapers. I once read an article about 3 months ago in a very serious American newspaper – the *Wall Street Journal* – entitled 'Ritual Murder on the Streets of Paris'. It was about a Jewish woman being killed one night by a Turk; and this was

described as 'ritual murder'. Two days later we discovered that the woman was not Jewish at all, and that the man who killed her, came from Morocco, not Turkey! Of course, there is a growing public expression of antisemitism in France, that is true. But can we say that, even if the perpetrators of those incidents are Muslim, even if 100% of them are, which is not true, is it very significant when the Muslim community in France numbers between 4 and 5 million people? I do not think so.

POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND THE MEDIA

Question: Do some of the Home Secretary's pronouncements play up to the Far Right agenda in Europe and the UK?

Claude Moraes:

Bilingualism is obviously an advantage. Often it is only those from remote or rural areas who really require language support and that should be available. The question is more about discrimination in the settled community, such as junior doctors who never become health service consultants if they have a Muslim name. Our task is to explain to the Home Secretary why it may be wrong – not to have knee-jerk reactions to what he says nor expect them from him.

Question: In Malaysia, there is a piece of legislation called the Sensitive Issues Act which actually prevents any discussion, any scapegoating, any publication or any announcement that smears or belittles other religions. Over the years, this has gathered some kind of social cohesion. I asked the former Home Secretary if would not possible to have something along those lines to get social peace in this country? He said "Oh no, we cannot do that, this is a free country!"

Claude Moraes:

We have to draw limits, I always say we should not be afraid of where we sit when we fight the far-right – the last criticism I heard was at a seminar recently. I was asking for more information about the positive impact of immigration in the UK. One academic said to me I should be careful what I wish for because a lot of this information will be to the detriment of some immigration, housing issues, etc. My answer was "Good! We need the truth. Fear stops us having that debate".

Mohammed Aziz, BRMC

I wanted to mention the Framework Council Decision on combating racism and xenophobia which would have tackled some of the issues you were raising in relation to Sensitive Issues Act. This Decision collapsed under the Greek presidency of the EU and the Berlusconi Italian presidency which has just come to an end. Now under the Irish presidency, with the British one to follow next year (July to December 2005), we might be able to revive it. It is something to keep in mind for groups looking at Europe for ways to combat racism.

Question: Would you agree that it is important to approach mainstream political parties to ensure that before even the start of an electoral campaign they commit themselves to condemn racism and they do not use the race card themselves?

Milena Büyüm:

I agree totally, the Commission for Racial Equality has done that in the last general election. It is a good way of raising the issue of racism in context of election. Politicians need to be careful about what they say, not to make too many throwaway remarks, etc. These elections are not just about a party's political campaign.

Question: I would like to raise a question around the media. If the Hutton report were to do with issues of racism, do you think the quest for truth would have been so intense? In the British media, any issue of race/racism is usually found in the twilight hours, people who are interested in the issue have to be nocturnal!

Graeme Atkinson:

I think the measure of it was the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Some sections of the media actually reported in a manner almost contradictory to their usual coverage. One of the media outlets that spearheaded the issue was the Daily Mail, a paper which is otherwise quite racist. Programmes that deal with diversity and have a positive content are, it is true, broadcast quite late and anything negative goes in the schedule early. The amount of negative reportage, thus, outweighs the positive reportage. No wonder, then, that black and ethnic groups and religious minorities in society feel like strangers in their own country, because of the way in which they are portrayed by the mass media – it has become invasive and is spreading now from the right-wing press like Daily Express or Daily Mail into radio. You've only to listen to something like Radio 5 Live to hear quite brazen racist arrogance being broadcast in this country.

EU ENLARGEMENT AND NEW MEMBERS STATES

Question: What is the likely impact of the accession of the new countries to the EU and of the potential trans-national immigration?

Claude Moraes:

The [Far Right's] strategy is emerging – already planned – timed to fit the moment when the press has primed the public. It's almost like they said: "it's four months before the EU enlarges: we have the best possible cocktail we could ever have – the Roma, migration, Europe. We hit them all". It's obvious. But it's very difficult now as it's an 'issue' – the one minority that everyone is free to attack, and conflating that with the EU and the policy of enlargement. This is a huge issue for us because many were warning the UK government this would happen. There are precedents. When Portugal, Spain and Greece first joined the EU there was a lot of debate, I remember, but the result in the medium term was a reduction in the numbers of those nationals working in the 12 EU member states.

It would be naïve to think that the papers won't inflate the issues and the projected numbers. Our task will be to inform people of what really happens and will happen. The government has been quite strong on this – on the benefits of enlargement, that it's a good thing. The Irish and British have been strong and positive on the issue of enlargement and the benefits.

Question: We know very little about the Far Right in the new accession countries to the EU. Could you say something about the situation there?

Graeme Atkinson:

We know that in Hungary and Poland, there are fascist organisations. They are also sectarian, in the sense that they are based in Catholic fundamentalism, right-wing populist organisations. However some other countries are a blank space. I have approached a lot of anti-racist/anti-fascist organisations, approached Members of the European Parliament for information on this and there is no real reliable information about extreme or populist right organisations in countries like Slovakia or Baltic states. It has to be said though, that in eastern Europe, where we do have reliable info, some of the worst organisations on the right stand in the tradition of clerical fascism, especially in Hungary – where there is an organisation that is the successor of the pre-war Arrow Cross movement and in Poland – and these organisations are extremely anti-semitic even though the Jewish population there is extremely small.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Question: How is the far right organised within the European Parliament. How do these far right parties affect policies adopted at European Parliament level?

Claude Moraes

Maybe if a BNP MEP is elected we will see a more thuggish manifestation of it, but mostly far right parties are inactive in the European Parliament – they are more posturing than willing to get down to legislation, which is why I come back to the thesis about mainstreaming because they are there in numbers.

Again what do you call the far right? There are different groupings – i.e. independents and radicals and all sorts of groupings – in the European Parliament, but what most of them have in common is that they don't legislate – they don't do any work, which can be helpful. But the centre right, centre left, greens, liberals do, so it is their effect in overall numbers on the mainstream policies that you see. So for example the centre right and British Conservatives voted against the race equality directive – hard to think how you could be a British Conservative and vote against something that is exactly measurable to the Race Relations Act which British Conservatives originally voted for in the 1970s. You also get the absurd situation where those people on the further right of the centre right in the European Parliament, for example Irish MEPs on an issue like migration, are realising that they are a country that has produced immigrants. They now have huge integration problems. They want to be more progressive – they can end up being more progressive even than some people on the left. The impact is on the mainstream, it is the electoral pressure! They have problems in their own backyard: if you are Belgian you are fighting the Vlaams Blok. It's a small country, so when you come to the EP you are deeply affected; therefore, voting for third-country nationals is a huge issue in Belgium because of the alliance between the Christian Democrats and the Vlaams Blok. So, basically they are there but they don't do anything; they have their seats, and there will be more in the next European elections.

TERRORISM AND ITS IMPACT

Question: What is the European dimension to the issues linked to the war on terror? Indeed, the rise of racism and the extreme-right in Europe seems to coincide with the “justified” laws against terrorism.

Claude Moraes:

The whole justice and home affairs agenda since 9/11 has shifted more to anti-terrorism legislation and control than the civil liberties agenda that there was before. Before 9/11 there were strong prospects for some progressive justice and home affairs policies, the emphasis on free movement and improving immigration policies, and links with countries of origin. I remember in 1999/2000 there was a relatively positive view of what could be achieved, for building on it so that, after 2004, justice and home affairs would be a legislative area. Remember the Tampere summit in Finland in 1999 where, for the first time, we talked about the positive migration policies and the race equality directive. Now, since 9/11, the whole emphasis has shifted to control and anti-terrorism.

EDUCATION

Question: Education is the key and with the anti-racist movement in decline, we need more inclusive history teaching. Is it not an idea to have Europe-wide inclusive history teaching to prevent people's refusal to understand each other?

Jean-Yves Camus:

The rejection of the multi-cultural society in France is so strong that we do not have anything like a curriculum in French schools or universities about ethnic diversity and the traditions of other ethnic communities. This just does not exist.