CHALLENGE TO THE LEFT

UNITE FOR JUSTICE!
EDITORIAL

For two decades black community organisations have been struggling with white left groups over anti-racism – persuading them that black self-organisation is no threat, that black people have to be definers of their own struggles, that the white working class can also be ‘a part of the problem’.

It looked as though the lessons had been learned. But the response from some of the Left to the Kings Cross Two Campaign shows that we are back again fighting over the same issues. For sections of the Left tried to prevent the youths’ march through central London on 31 August, arguing that it would heighten tension and not solve problems. Whose problems? Isn’t tension already high enough for Drummond Street youth who face racial attacks daily? They were being asked to calm down and slope off quietly in case their protest upset white (and often racist) residents of Somers Town!

Worse, the Left arrived at its strategy of appeasement by imbibing the media’s version of the murder of Richard Everitt and the consequent ‘guilt’ of Badrul Miah and Showkat Akbar. For the media had been determined to portray the murder as a black-on-white racist crime – despite the evidence that the attack happened because Asian youth were trying to recover properly that a white youth had stolen from them. And the Left, having accepted the racialised version of events, failed to see the gross miscarriage of justice perpetrated against two individuals who, in the absence of clear proof, were nominated to take the blame for the whole community.

No doubt left groups are motivated by a fear of exacerbating white working-class racism in one of the poorest areas of the country into a more strident fascism. But you don’t prevent that by stopping one march; it takes long-term everyday graft in white communities. Since when do you prevent the rise of fascism by denying support to its victims?

Instead of accommodating to racism the left groups should have been fighting it – by educating everyone in the community: pointing out how the media had racialised the killing and the way the investigation and trial had been distorted. The last thing they should have tried to do was to suppress black initiative and so undermine the black campaign.

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The appeal for Badrul & Showkat will be heard on Friday, 8 November. Join the demonstration outside the High Court on the Strand at 10am

Free the Kings Cross Two Campaign

On 31 August, 500 Asian youths marched through the heart of London against the advice of many of the major anti-racist and left organisations.

One night a boy is killed, for no explicable reason, by knife-carrying youths. His death is a senseless tragedy. The hearts of the nation go out to the boy’s grieving parents.

But come the trial of those accused, it is clear that the boy who is later to be convicted of murder has had no involvement in the killing. He is not picked out in any of the 20 identification parades he attends. There is not one shred of evidence to suggest that he carried any weapon or inflicted the fatal wound. He is nevertheless given a life sentence for murder under the ‘joint enterprise’ doctrine, that he was with a group of people, one of whom had a knife and carried out the killing. Even the judge tells him that he is ‘carrying the can’ for others who are not on trial.

These are the facts of Badrul Miah and Showkat Akbar’s case, two young Bengalis from Somers Town convicted in August 1995 for murder and violent disorder respectively, following the death of 15-year-old whiteschoolboy, Richard Everitt.

Such injustice cries out for a campaign. The local Asian community, many of whom were questioned during the police investigation and were targets of the racial
tension which followed the murder, called for a public expression of outrage. For the last year the families of the two boys have campaigned - they have held well-attended pickets of the CPS offices and Wormwood Scrubs prison, and have held public meetings which have been packed with local people. But they have had no support from wider left networks, with a few honourable exceptions.

**Our allies**

The campaign to free the Kings X Two has always been about rectifying a miscarriage of justice, something that the black and white community can unite around. So what led the Socialist Workers Party to argue at a stewards’ meeting the night before the demo that it should be cancelled, the Labour council to do its utmost to sabotage the demonstration by refusing permission for a rally in a council park, Paul Boateng MP to deny ever having sponsored the campaign as soon as local newspapers questioned him about his support?

For the Campaign, such responses come from a fundamental misunderstanding of the case, either that or an unwillingness to campaign on the issue. The SWP, for example, is still presenting Richard’s death as a ‘racist killing’ by Asians, echoing the tabloid press and the false arguments of the CPS at the trial which resulted in the conviction (see CARF 29). Hence its argument that to campaign for the freedom of Badrul and Showkat was insulting to the parents of Richard Everitt, that the campaign was ‘anti-white’ and would increase racial tension locally.

Such arguments seriously confuse the issues. One of the jobs of the Kings X Two Campaign has been to try to go beyond the emotional and racialised press coverage and present the true facts of the case. And the truth is that Richard Everitt’s death was not a ‘race’ killing, but a tragic case of mistaken identity arising out of a feud. If the Left wanted to decrease racial tension in Somers Town, that is the message it should have sought to get across.

By racialising the killing rather than the investigation and trial, our so-called allies have done both Richard’s family and Badrul and Showkat’s families a disservice. Their response shows left groups running scared. Scared of the racism of the white working class (which, by racialising the killing, they have pandered to). Scared of genuine black community self-organisation. Scared of a campaign which they cannot control. When the Everitts announced a counter-demonstration to oppose the Campaign’s march, the response of some left groups was to argue for the cancellation of the Kings X Two demonstration. At best they are allowing the white working class in Somers Town, with all their prejudices, to set the agenda, at worst they are blaming Asian youth, who are fighting a miscarriage of justice, for provoking white racists.
From a miscarriage of justice to justice for all

Throughout the last year the Campaign has trodden with utmost sensitivity. Every leaflet condemned Richard's murder. Every leaflet called for black and white to unite for justice, saying 'we don't want to see innocent people murdered, nor people locked up for crimes they didn't commit'. We recognise that the situation locally is a delicate one,' a spokesperson from the Campaign said. The Everett family are grieving for their son, and we have done our utmost not to counterpose the tragedy of Richard's death to the fight for justice for Badrul and Showkat. After all, justice has not been done for either family.

The MIAs received this message through their letterbox the night before the demonstration.

In the event, the demonstration, organised and mobilised for largely by local youth, was a success. 'There is new confidence now in the community,' one person told us. 'Now the challenge is to sustain our resistance, to build something effective and long-term among the Asian youth which will enable us to tackle the racist violence and police harassment which has prevailed in Somers Town for far too long.'

Bengali youth of Drummond Street and the Free the Kings X Two Campaign have shown how it is possible to fight issues of race in an area of extreme polarisation between black and white communities. Now it is up to those who work among the white working class to take up the challenge. ■

The Free the Kings X Two Campaign
desperately need in need of funds.
Please send donations to
Box 162, 63 Camden High Street,
London NW1 7JL
Tel 0956 145694/0956 646703/0973 632827

No to 'National Europeans First'

The FN is tapping into a mood of protectionism brought about by fears and insecurities surrounding European harmonisation. As Europe restructures into a single market, all the better to compete with other world trading blocs, the pace of change is phenomenal. In order to gain votes and popularity, politicians from both Left and Right, portraying themselves as champions of constituencies affected by change, demand protection for Europe's economy and for workers' jobs. Often, populist protectionist demands are couched in racist terms. It's EU workers against non-EU workers, Europe against the Third World. And Third World workers are not only outside but inside racist Europe, denied citizenship through racist laws.

EUROPEANS FIRST

In the past, anti-racists have campaigned against laws which exclude immigrants, migrants and asylum-seekers from the social and political rights that white Europeans enjoy, but we have been slow to catch on to the parallel trend of laws and practices which simply put Europeans first. 'National Preference' is not confined to the far Right. It is also enshrined in legislation.

Public sector bans

Many EU member states reserve some public sector jobs for nationals, despite a 1988 European Court of Justice ruling that blanket bans on 'aliens' in the public sector are discriminatory. France, which has one of the worst records in this respect, has challenged this ruling in its constitutional court, referring to the 'constitutional principle of reserving access to public service posts to the French'. (Constitutional arguments are also cited by Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain to justify public sector bans.)

Due to labour needs in education and health care, France has sought to get round its own public sector ban. This has been achieved by recruiting North African.

Undocumented but Invigorated by the actions of the St Bernard hunger-strikers, the French anti-racist movement and the Left have been galvanised into action in support of immigrant protests.

The struggle began in March, when the group of about 315 adults and 50 or so children, mainly from Mali, Senegal and other sub-Saharan countries, occupied St Ambroise church in Paris, in protest at the laws which had rendered their status illegal.

Criminalised

The Pasqua laws of 1993 and 1994, and the recent Toubon laws, removed residence rights from many people long resident in France, including parents of French-born children, husbands and wives of French citizens and students who stayed on to work in education or medicine. Many have found themselves in a limbo in which they cannot be deported, but cannot get permits to stay either, which are passports to housing, education, jobs and social welfare provision. French-born children who are refused naturalisation at 18 because of criminal convictions also find themselves status-less in France.

The 315 protesters included many who had lived in France for ten years or more before finding themselves unable to renew their residence permits and suddenly described as 'illegal immigrants'. A large part of their battle has been to convince the French media and public that it is not they, but the laws which criminalise them, which should be so described.

After being evicted from St Ambroise in April when the parish priest called in
teachers and doctors – on annual renewable contracts – to fill posts in rundown inner cities that no French worker would care to fill. Eventually these North Africans would have been regularised. But the Pasqua laws have changed this and a national defence committee has had to be formed to stop the deportation of these non-EU workers.

Labour immigration hierarchies
Most EU countries have a policy of not admitting new foreign workers unless the job cannot be filled by a national, an EU national or a legally resident foreigner.

- **Austria**: 1992 law on foreigners allows non-resident foreigners to work only in seasonal jobs and tourism. A new Aliens Law in 1993 obliges employers to lay off foreigners before Austrian workers. Foreigners without a livelihood can then be expelled.

- **Germany**: 1969 law demanded that German citizens must always be given preference over a foreigner when a job vacancy is filled. Residence permits can also be rescinded through unemployment, differences with an employer, or brushes with the law.

- **France**: 1932 law granting priority in jobs to the national indigenous workforce was scrapped by the Socialists in 1981. But government directives issued by the present Gaullist administration are undermining the Socialist changes.

The racist aspect of labour and immigration policy is at its clearest in Switzerland. Under the 1991 'three circles' labour migration policy, only workers from the 'first circle' (EU and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) nationals) may work in Switzerland. Workers from the 'second circle' (United States and Canada) are categorised as 'tolerated' by the Swiss labour market. All other countries fall into the 'third circle', nationals of which are systematically and legally denied the right to work in Switzerland on the grounds that they cannot 'integrate' and that they are 'culturally different'. Now a Federal Commission Against Racism has branded the 'three circles' labour migration policy as racist, saying that such categories fuel xenophobia.

**FAR-RIGHT ASSAULT ON LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT LAWS**

It is these existing institutionalised practices that make Le Pen's Campaign for National Preference so alarming. Just as the far Right has succeeded in shifting

the police, the group spent time in a gymnasium, an arts centre and a railway depot before occupying the church of St. Bernard on 28 June. They stayed there until the police raid of 23 August. The protest has been combined with a number of hunger strikes: ten went on hunger strike in Versailles cathedral in April; 55 others embarked on hunger strike in May, and another ten in July.

The ten continued for over 50 days, until the end of August.

**A new agenda**

The organisation of the campaign owes much to the participants' involvement in anti-colonial struggles in Mali, where many of the protesters come from, and has enabled the campaign to operate autonomously while uniting diverse left groups and unions in support. The network of support and solidarity radiated outwards from the local Muslim community round the church, who raised money through the mosques, to the 'Group of Ten' formed to organise support among the Left and the unions, and the group of famous personalities who acted as mediators in negotiations with the authorities, finally embracing the 20 or more solidarity groups set up all over France, as well as international support. At first, established anti-racist groups such as SOS Racisme, the unions and the Left responded by either ignoring the campaign or trying to take it over. SOS Racisme said it would take up a handful of 'the strongest compassionate cases', leaving the others to their fate. The Africans refused: they did not want charity for some, but rights for all. They continued to campaign for 'Papers for all', including
the centre-right parties to more extreme positions on immigration, it will seek to do the same on employment and labour laws. The danger is of further institutionalising of racism brought on by the centre-right parties conceding to far-right demands.

**FN – largest working-class party?**

Le Pen knows he is on to a popular thing. An analysis of voting patterns in the 1995 presidential election reveals that the FN is now the largest party of the working class. Some 30 per cent of workers voted for Le Pen; so did 25 per cent of the unemployed. Le Pen’s popularity is strongest in regions hit by industrial decline, urban crisis, and the rise of petty crime.

Hence, Le Pen’s Campaign for National Preference seeks to go down to the grassroots of discontent, to build social movements for legislative change, around issues of employment, housing, education, crime. His express aim is to smash the Left (a coordinator of ‘class-based actions’ has even been appointed), particularly the Communist party which still has a grassroots infrastructure. Thus, the FN has already moved into the trade union arena, establishing its own branch in the transport service (a tricky business as Le Pen, mindful of his middle-class backers, opposes public sector strikes). A campaign for national preference in recruitment has been launched in the Parisian Transport Association Network (RATP). And the FN National Circle for the Retired and Pre-Retired organised a meeting on ‘Social Protection for the French’ and has called for national preference in child and family allowance and in pension rights.

In Marignane, the FN administration has made drastic cuts in the voluntary sector, and with some of the savings has created a new organisation for the French unemployed. And the launch of its own charity, the ‘Fraternité’, to give basic help and clothing to the destitute on presentation of a French identity card, gives new meaning to the old proverb ‘Charity begins at home’. But it is in the field of housing that the FN believes it can make most gains. The FN des Locataires (Tenants’ FN) has been formed and the FN has stood for elections for tenants’ associations, gaining notable successes.

**TRADE UNIONS MUST PROTECT ALL WORKERS**

In France, some trade unions are mobilising against the FN’s move into their territory. Two of France’s biggest trade unions have come out against the FN, and the Democratic Confederation of Workers has published a pamphlet calling for management not to recognise the RATP ‘pseudo union’.

But it is not enough for the trade unions to be anti-fascist on paper. Trade unions must put time and resources into channelling the white working class discontent upon which the far Right seeks to build. Above all, they must represent all workers and not concede one iota to the prevailing anti-workers and anti Third World worker mood. They must challenge anti-work arguments, not concede to them.

**Negative trends**

Unfortunately, some trade unions are going down the protectionist and nationalist road. In Austria, the ground is ripe for an FN-style national preference campaign. Comparative studies show Austria as having the worst record in Europe for discrimination in labour laws, and far-right leader Jörg Haider links immigration to unemployment. But, unbelievably, it is the unions which are at the forefront of this new offensive.

The national executive of the Austrian Trade Unions Federation has lobbied for a new restrictive labour migration policy, proposing that new labour migration should only be allowed if no person with the qualifications demanded can be found in Austria. Meanwhile, the Chamber of Labour has called for a new restrictive policy on family reunification, citing the problem of ‘bogus marriages’.

Germany, too, is in danger of seeing a labour-led campaign. The Social Democrats, historically allied to the trade unions, portray themselves as a

regularisation for asylum-seekers awaiting decisions for a long time, for partners and children of French citizens and for parents of French children. As the hunger strike went into its fifth, sixth, seventh week, and the campaign’s publicity work began to bear fruit, the Left, the unions and the more progressive elements of the anti-racist movement fell in behind the demands.

**Police brutality**

On 12 August, police broke into the church and forcibly removed the ten hunger-strikers to hospital. They discharged themselves and returned to the church. The police action led to further support for the immigrants, who were generally seen as dignified and reasonable, in contrast to the authorities’ blundering violence. Then, early on 23 August, the church doors were smashed, tear gas thrown in and coughing men, women and children beaten and dragged out by 1,100 riot police. White supporters who had linked arms with the immigrants to prevent their removal were pushed aside as police went for all the black people in the church, including French citizens and journalists. The brutality of the raid wrong-footed the government and brought more support to the Africans. That night, 10,000 supporters marched in Paris, while 3,000–4,000 more congregated outside Vincennes, where 210 of the Africans were detained for possible deportation.

**The fight continues**

As the French prime minister and interior minister defended their handling of the occupations, the campaign continued to grow, inspiring occupations all over France. In August, 17 buildings were under occupation by immigrant groups, while hunger strikes were taking place in Tours, Lille and Le Havre. The weekend after the raid on St Bernard’s, solidarity demonstrations took place all over France. Since then there have been pickets of the French embassy in Rome, Amsterdam and London. By the end of August, eight of the protesters had been deported to Mali on two flights, including a man who had lived in France for eleven years. But such is the strength of the campaign that Air France staff at Dakar held a protest and refused to refuel the aircraft. Most of the others detained for deportation were released by the courts, often because the police raid was conducted with complete disregard for proper procedures, making many of the arrests illegal. About 50 have been told they will be allowed to stay. Meanwhile, the fight goes on, for the right to stay for those criminalised by illegitimate laws.
protectionist party. Leader Oskar Lafontaine states that immigration places too great a burden on employment and pension funds. And the influential building union, the IGB, has been at the forefront of demands for new legislation to protect German building workers from foreign competitors (even from within the EU).

**Historical lessons**

In the UK, anti-racists saw the effect of trade unions conceding to the anti-immigrant, protectionist lobby both in 1968, when the London dockers and the Smithfield meat porters struck in support of the anti-immigrant Conservative politician Enoch Powell, and in the 1970s when the NF formed a trade union association. CARF takes no delight in highlighting negative trends in trade unionism at a time when the far Right is championing the working class. Trade unions across Europe must reject protectionism and nationalism and become, once again, leaders in anti-fascism and internationalism.
Sixty years of fight

4 October 1996 marks sixty years since the battle of Cable Street, when over 50,000 working-class anti-fascists prevented Oswald Mosley and his 7,000 Blackshirts from ‘conquering the streets’ of the capital. This was, no doubt, a political milestone. And it is right that we recall such triumphs. But in asserting the principle ‘They shall not pass’, we should not forget the many other milestones since 1936 when residents – and especially new black residents – have come on to the streets to protect their communities.

In 1958, for example, West Indian residents of Notting Hill had to defend themselves against attacks from fascists. In 1977, as the National Front (NF) held provocative meetings and marches in black areas, residents came out in protest – often to be met by police violence. In 1979, when the NF threatened to hold a meeting in Southall town hall, the whole town downed tools and shut up shop to protest at the incursion. The police, who cordoned off the entire area, cleared the streets with extreme violence, and Blair Peach was killed by a blow from a Special Patrol Group officer’s truncheon.

As the anti-fascist fight was taken up by the younger black generation – against fascist meeting places and organised attacks – they encountered yet more violent policing. And, as the fight was carried into the courts, came the slogan ‘self-defence is no offence’.

SOME MILESTONES IN THE ANTI-FASCIST FIGHT

- 1958 West Indians take on fascists on the streets of Notting Hill
- 1968 Black People’s Alliance marches against Powell and his racist following
- 1974 Kevin Gately killed in Red Lion Square as 1,500 anti-fascists confront the NF in Conway Hall
- 1977 Anti-fascists mobilise to stop NF rally in Wood Green school on 23 April (St George’s Day).
- 1978 Anti-fascists protest at NF Youth Rally held in Digbeth civic centre, Birmingham
- 1979 Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Campaign launched to oppose racist attacks and NF paper-sellers in Brick Lane
- 1981 12 Asian youth arrested as they prepare to defend Bradford’s Manningham area from fascist attack
- 1984 Newham’s young black residents stop Duke of Edinburgh pub from being used by fascists planning racist attacks
- 1985 Anti-fascists protest against NF march
- 1987 Anti-fascists demonstrate against fascists in Remembrance Day parade
- 1989 Anti-fascists close down Carnaby Street shop selling Nazi merchandise
- 1990 First march against BNP headquarters in Welling
- 1992 Skrewdriver fans confronted by anti-fascists at the ‘Battle of Waterloo’
MICKEY FENN 1938-1996
A legend among anti-fascists

When CARF set out to record the history of Newham’s black community and the anti-racist anti-fascist fight in London’s East End, one of the first people we turned to was Mickey Fenn. Then a legend among anti-fascists, this wiry docker, an unpretentious working-class militant, was one of the few people still active who could help piece together a forgotten history.

Mickey entered the Royal Docks in 1965 and was elected onto the Communist-backed Unofficial Liaison Committee in 1966. In an interview with CARF in 1990, he summed up his anti-fascism as ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’. Even before the strike in support of Enoch Powell, the Anti-Immigration League was active amongst the Smithfield meat porters, and leaflets were circulating in the docks. Mickey was among the few who tried to stop the beginnings of the anti-immigration lobby and the Powellite movement. He was later critical of the poor response of the Unofficial Liaison Committee. When he saw the march on television, he said, ‘It was the only time that I felt really ashamed to be a docker.’ For pride in his class, in his trade union and in his profession was what characterised Mickey Fenn. And that is why racism and fascism were anathema to him.

In 1972, after the imprisonment of five dockers for secondary picketing, he was a leading light in the Pentonville Five campaign. In 1974, when the National Front gained 5,000 votes in Newham in the general election, he was visited by Special Branch and threatened with conspiracy charges for his militant anti-fascism. Fascists singled him out for a hate campaign in the mid-1970s. And he was arrested on very serious charges after a couple of nazis were manhandled in Newham in 1975 – only to be acquitted after a long Old Bailey trial. In 1989 he was one of 140 dockers to be victimised by the port employers and sacked after a bitter strike.

It was the dockers’ strike in support of Powell, though, that probably crystallised Mickey’s anti-fascism. If he was critical of the Unofficial Committee – he was then a member – for not taking a lead, he sought to rectify this later. Shortly after the Powell strike, two black dockers, who had been employed on a semi-casual basis on the wharves, were transferred to the Royal Docks for full registration. At a London Shop Stewards meeting at Tilbury, leaflets were circulated demanding a march against the employment of blacks. But Mickey and others, who went on to form Dockers Against Racism, put a stop to this. ‘There was no recurrence of a Powell demonstration. This was the best thing that came out of it, and no one even knows. I’m telling you this now, no one ever made an effort to find out,’ Mickey told us sharply.

With Mickey’s untimely death, the anti-fascist movement has lost an important chronicler of its history. It is up to us now not to lose sight of the struggles Mickey Fenn – socialist, trade unionist, anti-fascist – represented and the things that he stood for.
From blacking up to standing up

There is a tradition of black comedy on TV. But what does the future hold?

The changes that have taken place in television comedy over the last twenty years can be illustrated by considering Lenny Henry's television career. He started in the late seventies at a time when the only well-known black British television entertainer was Kenny Lynch, who appeared alongside Bruce Forsyth and Jimmy Tarbuck, just so that he could be the butt of their racial 'jokes'. 'Blacking up' white performers to play black roles was widespread, in shows like It Ain't Half Hot, Mum and especially The Black and White Minstrel Show. It was on the Minstrels club tour that Lenny Henry began his career. Sitcoms like Mind Your Language, which was one of the only mainstream programmes in which Asians appeared, paraded racial stereotypes like they were going out of fashion. As far as national broadcasting was concerned, they were. The 1980s saw a new 'multicultural' agenda in broadcasting. Before 1983 there had rarely been an opportunity for writers from black communities to write comedy for those communities. Of course, producers had had liberal pretensions: even Mind Your Language had one episode in which the teacher in the adult education school mistakenly assumes a black visitor to be a lost student looking for his English-language class, when he is in fact an education inspector from the council. But these kinds of gestures were ambiguous because they tended to turn blatant racial prejudice into just another one of those quirky foibles which characters in the English tradition of sitcom have always been loved for.

The experience of 'multicultural' programming in the 1980s, mainly at Channel Four and at the BBC, left a number of positive achievements. Programmes like Desmond's showed what blackBritish comedy could be: confident, long-lasting, and popular. On Lenny Henry's own show, he was able to play black comic characters which weren't tokenistic, or fall-guys for racial mockery. The crude stereotyping of the seventies would now be unacceptable on the four national channels. In recent years, live black comedy has taken off, and been transferred to television. Henry now runs his own production company, Crucial Films, which was responsible for The Real McCoy.

While noting the progress which has been made, we also need to acknowledge the limitations of the 'multicultural agenda'. Many of the people who run television still have a tokenist attitude - put in a black role, or commission a black programme, for credibility points. For example, Channel Four always commissions one and only one black comedy show at a time. While Desmond's was running, it would have been impossible for another black sitcom to get shown, no matter how good the idea was. This also means that it has been difficult for unknown black performers to get roles. Furthermore, until recently, there has been a tendency to commission shows which were very traditional in terms of their comedy; outside multicultural budgets, comedy is allowed to be more innovative.

Comedy as commodity

We now stand at an important crossroads in the development of black comedy on television. Broadcasting generally is becoming more competitive as the four national channels become deregulated and increasingly face competition from subscription channels. Black comedy now has to compete as a commodity. While the black comedy club circuit is thriving, the transfer of this scene to television will depend for its commercial success on its appeal to white audiences. In the USA, usually means being unfunny, because comedy is often about breaking taboos on what we can normally say, rather than following even more rules. The real political issue lies elsewhere. Historically black British communities have had to struggle to get broadcast comedy which connects with those communities' experiences. As Norman Beaton put it: 'What you've seen in are the only roles that are available for black men in this country, and they don't really reflect our views, our understanding of life, our intelligence, or where we are coming from.'

THE POLITICS OF COMEDY

Doesn't most comedy depend on recognising well-known stereotypes? You'd think so. But there is a difference between comic characters whose sole purpose is to reinforce the crudest and most predictable racial stereotypes, and comic characters who are recognisable black characters but who are treated with more depth and sympathy. The former is simply bad, unimaginative comedy, which may nevertheless be popular because it fits the racial vision of the mainstream at the time.

But isn't comedy just a matter of taste? To a certain extent it is. We all have different preferences for the different forms of comedy: stand-up, sitcoms, sketches, impersonation, satire, etc. But there is also an ideological dimension to comedy. Jokes can shore up boundaries in society or expose those boundaries to ridicule.

Is there any point in taking comedy seriously? By treating comedy politically don't we miss the point, and open ourselves up to ridicule? Trying to do 'politically correct' comedy usually means being unfunny, because comedy is often about breaking taboos on what we can normally say, rather than following even more rules. The real political issue lies elsewhere. Historically black British communities have had to struggle to get broadcast comedy which connects with those communities' experiences. As Norman Beaton put it: 'What you've seen in are the only roles that are available for black men in this country, and they don't really reflect our views, our understanding of life, our intelligence, or where we are coming from.'
black comedy is increasingly marketable to a non-black audience who watch programmes like *Def Comedy Jam* for their 'rawness' and 'energy.' In addition, the larger size of the black population there means that specialist cable channels such as Black Entertainment TV (BETV), which has been running since 1980, are also more viable. Comedy plays a central role in BETV's overall packaging. An equivalent channel in Britain, IDTV, has been launched by the BETV group, but the smaller audience size here means that there will be a tendency to imports from America or the Caribbean, rather than domestic productions. A similar trend can be seen in some of Channel Four's recent programming, especially the *Black Christmas* season in 1994. These tendencies mean that comedy which is made by people from black British communities for those communities is under threat.

**The Asian experience ignored**

In Britain, Asian comedy has not received the same recognition that African-Caribbean comedy has achieved. Is this because the mainstream white audience can enjoy African-Caribbean comedy for its perceived 'rawness' and 'excitement' while Asian comedy assumes a familiarity with Asian family life which the mainstream will shy away from? Broadcasting institutions have a duty to allow all communities to produce comedy that connects with their experiences, but this has rarely happened for Asians. The recent BBC Radio 4 series, *Goodness Gracious Me*, which in its very title acknowledges the stereotyped appearances Asians normally make in British comedy, is perhaps the first time that a regular series of British Asian comedy has been broadcast nationally. The series deserves to be transferred to television. Using a sketches format, the show features a range of Asian com-

**BLACKS IN BRITISH COMEDY THROUGH THE YEARS**

1972 *Love Thy Neighbour* A sitcom starring Rudolph Walker based around a black couple with a racist neighbour. Like Alf Garnett in *In Sickness and in Health* and *Till Death Us Do Part*, racism is turned into comedy by presenting it as a loveable eccentricity.

1973 *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum* One of the most popular British sitcoms ever, finally ended in 1981 amid some embarrassment over its racial stereotyping. White actors were 'blacked up' to play Indians.

1976 *The Fosters* This adaptation from the US series *Good Times* was the first British sitcom set in a black family. A young Lenny Henry interrupted his club tour with *The Black and White Minstrel Show* to play alongside Carmen Munroe and Norman Beaton.

1978 *Mind Your Language* Hugely popular at the time, leading to a US version being made. The premise of the sitcom – a class of immigrants being taught English – enabled an unprecedented number of racial stereotypes to be included in a single show.

1978 *The Black and White Minstrel Show* The long-running show – which featured white singer/dancers 'blacked up' – was finally ended by the BBC after a ten-year campaign. With audiences reaching 12 million viewers, it was one of the most popular BBC programmes ever. The BBC was never able to export the show to the US because broadcasters there feared political opposition. South African television wanted to buy the show but the BBC refused to sell it to an apartheid state, while continuing to broadcast it here. The BBC received royalties from the Minstrel club tours for at least ten more years after the show was ended.

1983 *Mixed Blessings* A black woman marries a white man, but their parents aren't happy.

1985 *Tandoori Nights* A comedy set in an Indian restaurant, starring Saeed Jaffrey.

1987 *The Lenny Henry Show* Lenny Henry achieves national star status as a result of his successful *BBC 1* show. Successfully exported to the Caribbean and to Black Entertainment TV in the US.

1988 *Desmond's* The successful Channel Four sitcom set in a black barber's shop in Peckham begins its six-year run, starring Norma Strop and Carmen Munroe.

1990 *The Real McCoy* BBC2's award-winning stand-up comedy and sketch show starts, coming out of the growing black comedy circuit based at venues like the Hackney Empire.

1993 *IDTV* The US BETV organisation launches a cable channel in London aimed at black viewers.

1994 *Get Up, Stand Up* A second black stand-up comedy show starts.

CS spray an officially-approved police weapon. More CPS cover-ups on black deaths in police custody. Routine abuse of black communities across the country – and another black death. Never before has there been such a need for national coordination over policing.

Shiji Lapite
The second CPS decision came after the inquest into the death of Shiji Lapite, who died in December 1994 after being arrested by officers from Stoke Newington police station. The neck-hold used on him broke the bones in his voice box. When the inquest jury decided that he had been unlawfully killed, the file was returned to the CPS to reconsider its earlier decision not to prosecute the officers. Despite the unlawful killing verdict, it has reiterated the decision.

Justice for Amer Rafiq
Six months after 21-year-old Amer Rafiq lost his eye in the custody of Manchester police (see CARF 31) his family discovered, through the pages of the Manchester Evening News, that there was to be no prosecution of the police officers involved. A leaked PCA report into the incident recommended that no officers be prosecuted. A month later the CPS officially confirmed it. Campaigners are outraged that the report was never made available to the family and say the leak reveals a cover-up attempt by the CPS, the PCA and the Greater Manchester Police force. The report showed that the socket of Amer's right eye was shattered inside the police van by a 'wham ram' (used to batter down doors). "What are they saying? That Amer beat his own head against the wham ram?" asked a campaign spokesperson. The police van apparently took 30 minutes to take Amer on a five-minute journey from the Eid celebrations in Wilmslow Road where he was arrested, to Platt Lane police station. It is what occurred in the van during the missing 25 minutes that Amer and the campaign seek to establish.

The Amer Rafiq defence campaign is determined not to let the matter rest. It called an immediate picket at the spot where Amer was arrested, and has held public meetings and mass pickets outside the court where writs have been issued for civil actions against the police officers involved.

Amer Rafiq defence campaign, Dept 107, 1 Newton Street, Manchester M1 1HW. Tel: 0976 247707.

Stop the brutality – enough is enough
Stop the brutality – enough is enough

Ahmed El Gammal
Ahmed El Gammal, a 33-year-old Egyptian PhD student and part-time lecturer, died after he was arrested and taken to Leyton police station, east London. He was declar-
ed fit for detention by a forensic medical examiner, but five hours later he was dead. A post-mortem found that he had died of acute coronary thrombosis (a similar condition to that found in Wayne Douglas and Ibrahima Sey after their deaths). Police at first claimed that he had been found breaking and entering into the home of a vicar, a claim they later retracted.

Ban the killer spray

The trials of CS spray are over. Michael Howard approved its use nationwide on 28 August despite concerns about its safety and police misuse. Two police forces, Hertfordshire and Surrey, which participated in the trials, have withdrawn the spray from use after safety concerns. The delay in approving the spray for use nationally was a result of three police officers suing for damages after sustaining injuries during the trials.

Introduced as a defensive tool against 'violent subjects', the spray is apparently being used indiscriminately by police officers. Ibrahima Sey died just two weeks into the six-month trial period. He was in a police station, under arrest and handcuffed when the spray was used on him.

New weapon – new routine

In Cleveland, the spray was used on a 13-year-old girl and a 14-year-old boy in a local authority home. The police, called after the two children barricaded themselves into a room, climbed in through a window and sprayed the children. Also in Cleveland, a 31-year-old mother was sprayed after she resisted giving up her baby to social services, who called in police to assist. Cleveland police used CS spray 115 times, the most of any police force, during the six-month trial period.

In Wolverhampton, the staff and young users of an adventure playground were sprayed after police ran into the playground chasing a suspect. Also in Wolverhampton, police sprayed a Rastafarian youth worker who intervened in the arrest of a young boy who had been riding his bike on the pavement, and then charged the worker with obstruction.

Romford Road racism

Anger at recent police brutality in Newham, east London, has led campaigners to demand that action is taken against Forest Gate police station. Newham Monitoring Project is currently dealing with several cases near the police station in the Romford Road area.

\[CARF\] readers may remember the Khan family, who claim they were brutally assaulted by officers outside their home (see CARF 22). Their problems with the police continue. When Mustapha Khan was attacked in September outside the family’s factory by a racist calling him a ‘stupid Paki’, eight police vehicles arrived. Police demanded to search the Khans’ factory and allegedly threatened to spray objects with a CS spray canister. Mustapha Khan was held at Forest Gate police station for six hours before being released without charge. No action has been taken against his attacker, and police have declined to interview witnesses to the attack.

\[CARF\] Three youths, Amar, Ahmed and Mahul were stopped by police on Romford Road on their way home from a nightclub. Two of the boys were beaten up and arrested. When a (white) passer-by, horrified at the brutality he had witnessed, went to the police station to lodge a complaint, he was given a bloody nose and severe bruising for his efforts.

\[CARF\] Melva Smith is a 53-year-old grandmother. She was arrested in her home after an argument with her neighbour and taken to Forest Gate police station where she was held for eight hours. Melva is a mental health patient, which the police knew, but she says they refused to provide her with a social worker, psychiatrist or solicitor, denied her food and water, and turned off the buzzer in her cell so that she could not summon assistance.

According to NMP, ‘the excessive and inappropriate use of CS spray, the denial of access to solicitors and the turning off of cell buzzers are part of the day-to-day brutality of Newham police, and it is this brutality that inevitably led to the deaths of Ibrahima Sey and Ahmed El Gammal’. 
BNP bunker closes

Anti-racists are celebrating the British National Party’s announcement of the permanent closure of its bunker/headquarters/bookshop in Welling, south-east London following Bexley magistrates’ fine of £700 with £200 costs on Richard Edmonds, BNP party official and the building’s owner, for failing to remove fortifications.

The BNP headquarters opened in 1989 amid widespread fears that the fascists’ arrival would spark a wave of racist attacks in the area. Between 1990 and 1993 the BNP’s high-profile presence in local white working-class pubs and estates led to a horrifying increase in racist violence, which included the savage murders of three black youths, Rolar Adams, Rohit Duggal and Stephen Lawrence, in nearby Thamesmead and Eltham.

Mobilisations against the BNP presence culminated in a large demonstration in May 1993 and a 40,000-strong protest in October 1993. They were met by massive police efforts to ensure the safety of the building and BNP supporters, resulting in large-scale arrests and the jailing of anti-racists. In the face of escalating clashes, Bexley council belatedly instructed the BNP to stop using the premises as a headquarters. In September 1994 Edmonds was ordered to remove the fortifications erected to protect the building from anti-fascists, a decision upheld in April 1995 by environment minister John Gummer. By June 1996, as the BNP had failed to comply with the order, the council issued a summons. The nazis hastily removed some of the offending fortifications, only to replace them with others. Edmonds went to court, and the closure announcement followed.

Although Edmonds will continue to live at the shop, from where he will run a mail-order book service, the loss of its headquarters will further handicap the BNP in its lacklustre electoral efforts. For the people of south-east London the removal of these pernicious scum from the area will make life a lot safer.

Fascists infiltrate Goldsmith party

The National Democrats’ (ND) infiltration of billionaire financier Sir James Goldsmith’s Referendum Party reveals much about what they mean by the new ‘democratic’ programme they promise for the forthcoming general election, at which they intend to stand about 20 candidates.

Andy Carmichael, formerly a key NF organiser in the West Midlands who stood as a candidate in local and Euro-elections before jumping ship to Ian Anderson’s NDS, was able not merely to enter the Referendum Party but to become its West Midlands campaign manager. Since his dismissal from the post, Carmichael has claimed that Goldsmith’s outfit is ‘awash’ with fascists. While any claim by the likes of Carmichael needs to be taken with a rather large pinch of salt, his statement is lent some credence by the RP’s employment of Marc Gordon to assist in selecting potential candidates. In 1986, as Vice-Chair of the Federation of Conservative Students, Gordon ran campaigns in support of the Contra terrorists in Nicaragua, and later, as director of the UK International Freedom Federation (which has close links with Western Goals), took part in patrols on the Honduran/Nicaragua border with the Contras.

Recent reports suggest that the Referendum Party is having problems finding enough candidates to contest the general election. With the likes of Carmichael and Goldsmith in key positions in the party, perhaps it should stop wasting its time.

Whom the gods destroy, they first make mad

The British National Party’s leader-in-waiting, Nick Griffin, has threatened ‘multi-culturalists’ with the ‘ultimate penalty’ of execution, in an interview with the Wales on Sunday newspaper in which he also threatened to deport all black people and outlaw ‘mixed-race’ relationships. The timing of this up-front nazi rant is extraordinary: last year, when he was in the political wilderness, Griffin was full of praise for Tyndall’s electoral road to facism. The piece is a slap in the face to former Tyndall, who has warned BNP members to avoid any overtly fascist message in the run-up to a general election, and seems to be appealing direct to BNP supporters critical of their leader’s ‘soft line’ – unless it’s making a bid for the leadership of C18?

Strange that Griffin manages to split every organisation he ever gets involved in. How long before we read, in the pages of British Nationalist or Spearhead, about another plot by the security services to undermine the growth of British nationalism?

CHURCH LEADER RACIALLY ATTACKED

A senior member of the Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCJR), James Ozigi, was attacked by three white men outside his south London home in August. The attack happened when he heard shouting outside and sent his wife to find out what was happening. When he heard her being abused and called ‘nigger’ he went outside and spoke to three men, who sat upon him, punched and kicked him unconscious. The attackers also beat up his ten-year-old son, and a neighbour who came to assist was stabbed. The police were, Pastor Ozigi says, extremely slow to respond and his wife had to call them four times. They arrested two men at the scene but then bailed them without charge. The CCJR is pushing the police to pursue the case actively.

CCJR, 35-41 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL

October/November 1996
Stop Deportations

PICKET Manchester campaigners held a picket of British Airways’ Manchester office on 28 September to demand that BA stop carrying out the government’s racist policies. BA uses its aircraft to deport people, while refusing desperate undocumented refugees access to its flights to Britain, and the campaign is calling for a boycott and for letters to BA chief executive Sir Robert Ayling.

VICTORIES Mircea Ilin was celebrating with his British-Irish wife Margaret after his release from Rochester prison on the end of July, followed in August by the grant of a five-year residence permit (see CARF 32). The campaign, supported by Unison, held a picket of Rochester in August calling for the release of asylum-seekers.

Rabi ul-Islam, who became a popular and successful science teacher in Hackney after finishing his studies, has won his fight against deportation after colleagues took up his campaign. Congratulations to Hackney Anti-Deportation Group for both victories!

UPDATES Home Office minister Timothy Kirkhope has confirmed his decision to deport Florence Okolo and her children (see CARF 31), despite an immigration adjudicator’s recommendation that they should stay in Britain. Florence intends to judicially review Kirkhope’s decision, and the campaign is holding a demonstration on 16 November at 12 noon, at Alexandra Park (junction Princess Road and Clarmont Road), Moss Side, Manchester.

The Lashley family (see CARF 31) met immigration minister Kirkhope in July, when he promised to review their case personally. Audrey and Serena Grant’s hearing against deportation was postponed in September. The West Midlands Anti-Deportation Campaign will be picketing the high court on the new date of 14 November.

NEW CAMPAIGNS Abdullah Hussein, a Yemeni student who sought asylum in 1991, is facing deportation after the dismissal of his appeal against the Home Office refusal last November. Abdullah has many family members in Sheffield and his life would be in danger if he were to be returned. The Sheffield Asylum-seekers Campaign Group has launched a campaign for him and all rejected asylum-seekers.

Mrs Shah and her young baby Farwa Shujah were abandoned by her British-born husband when they came to Britain seeking his support. Now, because of his desertion, mother and daughter are told they will have to return to Pakistan. The Halehills & Chapeltown Law Centre is fighting for them to be allowed to stay with Mrs Shah’s relatives in Leeds.

STOP PRESS A week before her High Court hearing against her deportation, Prakash Chavrimootoo has been arrested and detained at Campsfield detention centre, outside Oxford. Prakash has been fighting to stay in Britain for six years, with her 13-year-old son Prem. Friends stopped police putting Prem in social services’ care and there was an immediate picket of the police station where she was arrested when she went to sign on.

Okolo Family Defence Campaign c/o St Philips Primary School, Loxford Street, Hulme, Manchester M15 6BT. Lashley Family Must Stay Campaign c/o 400 Chedwell Hill Road, Manchester M8 9LE. Abdullah Must Stay Campaign, c/o Sheffield Asylum Seekers Campaign Group, c/o BGF, ACE Centre, 120 The Wicker, Sheffield S3 8JD. Halehills & Chapeltown Law Centre, 263 Roundhay Road, Leeds LS8 4HT. West Midlands Anti Deportation Campaign, c/o Asian Resource Centre, 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B19.

Chapeltown update

On 4 November the re-trial of the Chapeltown defendants charged with violent disorder as a result of the events of 15 October 1994 (see CARF 32). Meanwhile, on 26 July, the five defendants who accepted the prosecution’s ‘plea-bargain’ and pleaded guilty to lesser offences were sentenced at Leeds Crown Court. The five were all given conditional discharges, extraordinarily lenient sentences considering that the night’s events were described by many of the police officers present as the most frightening of their entire career, and Judge Dobkin, made some interesting, if enigmatic, comments about who was responsible for the escalation of an extremely trivial incident into an event requiring hundreds of police and resulting in dozens of police vehicles damaged. Perhaps His Honour has been reading CARF!

FREE SATPAL RAM

MARCH TO MARK A DECADE OF INJUSTICE

Saturday 16 November 1996 marks the tenth anniversary of a racist gang attack on Satpal Ram in a Birmingham restaurant. Ten years on, the Free Satpal Campaign are holding a demonstration to demand his release from a life sentence for murder against one of his attackers.

SATURDAY 16 NOVEMBER

Assemble
12 noon,
Holyhead School,
Holyhead Lane,
Handsworth,
Birmingham.

Ring 0121-507 1618 for leaflets and posters.
Ring 0171-337 1450 for details of transport from London.
JUL 26 Inquest jury hears PCs Tuffey and Harrison admit hitting Brian Douglas with long-handled batons before his death but deny being 'trunceneer happy'

JUL 29 Government's independent immigration monitor Dame Elizabeth Anson says too many visitors' visa applications are being wrongly refused

JUL 30 Police Complaints Authority says it will investigate allegations of racism against Teesside policeman

Ethnic minorities have the worst housing and are most likely to live in overcrowded conditions, says government report. European Commission to investigate 'habitual residence test introduced to curb "benefit tourism"... British Sikh Federation holds talks with government to allow wearing of turbans at work after EU regulations ban them

AUG 1 19-year-old Asian whose family was racially abused by a neighbour in Medway, Kent, is arrested and racially abused by officers in police van... Home Office says it will review asylum application of 13-year-old Natasha Matambele, an Angolan living in east London who saw her brother killed

AUG 2 Olympic athlete Michelle Griffiths says she is proud to be black British after receiving racist hate mail saying she was not fit to represent Britain.

AUG 3 Turkish waiter Musa Konegaje who married 13-year-old Essex schoolgirl is refused visa to visit Britain for the birth of their child... Study by Single Homeless in London Group says ethnic minorities comprise almost half of London's homeless

AUG 5 Crown Prosecution Service announces that no police officer will face charges for the death of 25-year-old Wayne Douglas in Brixton last December. Home Office statistics show black males make up 10.8 per cent of the prison population in spite of comprising 1.9 per cent of the total UK population... Report says care is lacking for black elderly

AUG 8 Family of Brian Douglas express outrage at inquest verdict of death by misadventure

AUG 9 Crown Prosecution Service says no police officers will be charged with the unlawful killing of Shiji Lapiye... Pastor James Ozigi of Churches Commission for Racial Justice beaten by racist thugs outside his home

AUG 10 Wolverhampton Black Community Action Group organises march calling for end to use of CS spray claiming it is being used excessively and for no apparent reason

AUG 11 Report from National Association of Probation Officers and Association of Black Probation Officers says racism is rife within the criminal justice system - black people are failing to get senior jobs while a disproportionate number are ending up in jail

AUG 12 Asian couple say Scottish estate agent practised racial discrimination in complying with owner's request that no Asians be brought to view property... Report from Leicester University says more than half of African-Caribbean parents in Leicestershire feel the education system is letting their children down

Crown Prosecution Service says it will not pursue prosecution of speakers at Brixton rally for inciting riot... Turkish trade unionist Tektin Kartel awarded £13,500 damages for assault, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution by Metropolitan police... Black property inspector Jamie Williams awarded £40,000 compensation by tribunal against Southwark council which concoted a 'sham redundancy' to ostracise him from his job

AUG 14 Dewsbury police officer resigns after Police Complaints Authority upholds allegation that he assaulted an Asian man... Seventeen cases of racist harassment against Aberdeen council tenants have been reported since the council announced a crackdown last year... West Midlands police say they will investigate Ku Klux Klan hate mail sent to local anti-racist groups

AUG 16 Asian woman awarded £3,000 at tribunal after being refused a place at teacher training college and being told that people preferred to be taught English by someone of English origin

AUG 19 Judicial challenge launched to retroactive cuts in asylum-seekers' welfare benefits

AUG 22 Civil liberties groups protest at government decision to introduce voluntary identity card for children and adults

AUG 23 British National Party organiser Richard Edmonds fined for flouting enforcement order to remove barricades from Welling headquarters... Charities say asylum-seekers will soon be living in tented villages owing to benefit cuts

AUG 27 Racists hounding an Asian family in Southend are being helped by a wall of silence by neighbours and have suffered some of the worst examples of racism seen, says the council

AUG 28 Sunderland police ask residents of Fulwell to report suspicious behaviour after outbreak of racist stoning

SEPT 1 Penal Affairs Consortium says racism is endemic within criminal justice system

SEPT 2 Afro-Caribbean Resource Centre in Birmingham is vandalised... Pakistani heart patient Mohammed Yaqoob dies after immigration officials block his visa application to visit Britain for a heart operation

SEPT 3 Council of Civil Service Unions says ethnic minority candidates for top civil service jobs still face discrimination

SEPT 5 London taxi driver who told 85-year-old Jewish passenger that 'Hitler should have done the job' is fined £200 for threatening behaviour... Irishman Roger O'Doherty awarded £7,500 compensation after being refused motor insurance because he was not born in Britain

SEPT 6 Asian doctor forced to move from his Bristol home after receiving death threats in race hate campaign

SEPT 10 Half-Indian Lawrence Ramdas claims he was forced to quit Strathclyde police because of racism and that he had been warned that his new sergeant 'wasn't a great lover of black people'

SEPT 28 Responding to public pressure, a CD duplication company refuses to handle the new album by Nazi band 'No Remorse'.