ANTI-RACIST TACTICS IN HACKNEY

TIME FOR A RETHINK

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

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

Rising anger

There has been, as reported in previous issues of "New Age", a growing feeling of indignation among black people in Hackney against harassment by police, and with the free hand given to police to destroy the community they serve by the NF and their ilk.

It is particularly young black people who suffer from police harassment. Day after day, cases come to light of black youths who are picked up under the antiquated and racist "mans" law (the Parliament of Vagrancy Act, 1828). Often their 'crime' has been merely to be looking in a shopwindow.

A favourite trick is for the police to pick up the youths on Friday night and detain them over the weekend; and then on Sunday night without charging them so that no case has to be presented to the magistrates on Monday morning. This is done regularly in Hackney, but black youths are more likely to be picked up under the vagrancy laws than white people.

Let us be clear, black people in Hackney are refusing to put up with all this, and there is now the beginning of some organised resistance. The Hackney Black Parental Association (HBPA) was formed, and organised legal defence, picketing of tax courts, leafleting, educating people about the community, etc.

Black parents organise

Some women came in HBPA recently contacted the parents of black youths when they knew to be holding the black youths at the police. A meeting of these parents was held at the end of March, from which there resulted the formation of the Hackney Black Parents Association (HPPA).

Heaven help the police, local MPs, etc, pal! One of our main concerns helped to organise this meeting and was fortunate enough to witness some of the heated and angry feelings at it. There is no way the police will manage to break up this organisation.

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

Trots play destructive role

Some of those involved in the action against police and Trotskyst organisations. While some have done some good work, the results of some of their actions are not satisfactory.

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

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

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

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

Marching on...

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

For instance, one recent Sunday demonstration coincided with an NF turnout. Both marches went down Brick lane at the same time. As there were not many police around that time, this meant that when going under bridges in this narrow lane the two marches literally rubbed shoulders. The middle-headed young Asians when the NF had scraped together were ritually bawled at by the anti-racists. And they bawled back. What sort of a game is this?

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

Not surprisingly, many people in teacher-training colleges are beginning to ask themselves whether the participants in such marches, which are taking place merely for the good of their own souls, are not eccentric, fanatical and stupid.

This natural cynicism has resulted in the fact that the Bengals who actually live in the Brick lane area, including the Bengali Youth Movement which has played such an active part in local struggles, have virtually boycotted these 'heroic' marches which take place through their community.

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

The way forward

To conclude, then, the post-election weeks should provide a good opportunity for thinking over anti-racist tactics. We suggest that the following points are important to discuss. The police, immigration authorities and other organisations will be forced to rethink their tactics. One important point to bear in mind is that the NF would not have been able to march 50 yards down any street in the country if it had not been protected by the police, immigration authorities and other organisations. It should be remembered that if the NF was not able to march 50 yards down any street in the country it had not been protected by the state. Revolutionary leaders should always bear in mind that the struggle is not only to the divisive system of capitalism itself and is embodied above all in the struggle of the capitalist state. Anti-racists should accordingly concentrate their campaign for the future of the state, not merely the little ganges of Nazis which the state manages to parade around.

1. "New Age" no. 12 May 1979

Racism (HeAR) brought out a pamphlet exposing racist lies about housing. Both the immigration authorities and NF have been put out bydden, written by opportunity outsiders coming in and making out that they have an answer to everything. Only black people who see themselves are in a position to have a thorough understanding of the real character of white racism and at all suggest that white anti-racists are unimportant in the struggle. On the contrary they have a duty to participate. The point is that all anti-racists have to learn to do this.

2. The role of the state: The election results have justified the long years of work by the NF. It is quite likely that their particular brand of racism, by which the state will receive less support from the state. For instance, there is much less justification for their to hold police protection of their activities than there might have been if the election results had justified their claim to represent the views of a sizeable proportion of society. It will certainly be good if we hear less of them in future months. However, it must be remembered that NF thugs are fairly localised and occasional compared to the concentration of police and harassment by the police, immigration authorities and other organisations. On the contrary it should be remembered that if the NF was not able to march 50 yards down any street in the country it had not been protected by the police, immigration authorities and other organisations.

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