

"FASCISTS AND RACISTS GET OUT OF OUR TOWN!"

How a Community - Black and White, English and Irish, Young and Old - is getting organised! A Lead to all



Three of the four platform speakers...their message loud and clear and supported by the audience was "Fascists and racists out of Reading! Black and White unite and fight racism and fascism! No freedom of speech for National Front nazis! The chairman of Reading People Against Racism and Fascism (RPARAF), Martin Kaufman has written the article below.

IN MANY PARTS OF THIS COUNTRY workers and other progressive people are starting to see the need to organise against the twin threats of racism and fascism. There is a growing consciousness that especially in times of economic crisis the bosses and their State are increasingly looking around for ways to solve their problems by putting the whole burden of the crisis onto working people. More and more right-wing politicians and employers are reviving ideas first popularised by Mussolini and Hitler. One only has to read between the lines of articles in many newspapers and magazines to see evidence of mounting talk of one type or another of a police state; "Law and order", blaming the "blacks", the need for "a strong leader", and similar such notions are common currency in the media. There is talk of the weakness of Parliament, and the implication is that "strong government" should replace elected M.P.'s and the House of Commons. To anybody who knows anything about politics all this can mean only one thing: powerful and privileged elements within the British capitalist establishment are seriously considering the possibility of bringing into being a fascist police state which would speedily stamp out the few democratic liberties possessed by the working class.

Racism

They could only achieve this if they were able to successfully con, confuse and divert a sufficiently large section of society, not only working people but members of the middle class, particularly those who are at present frustrated with their lot as they try in vain to make ends meet and find security. And racism is the principal means by which this fraudulent diversion is to be perpetrated. A LARGE NUMBER OF READING PEOPLE ARE DETERMINED TO PREVENT THIS AND HAVE LAUNCHED A CAMPAIGN TO DO SO. The last thing that fascists want is a united working class allied with other progressive people and so they use racism to split the working class, as did Hitler in Germany. Racists like Enoch Powell and those in the

National Front are well aware that if they can get white workers to place the blame for unemployment, housing shortage and other social problems on black or Irish workmates and neighbours, instead of on the bosses and their capitalist State which is the real cause of these problems, then workers will be well and truly divided... and with a divided working class the reactionaries can do just as they please.

In Britain today, racists and fascists are getting organised. The "Voice of the People" has published many examples of how these enemies of the people are spreading their hate and lies. But they are not the only ones getting organised. Anti-racist and anti-fascist groups are winning support for a militant struggle against the growing danger. One such organisation is READING PEOPLE AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM (RPARAF) which wishes to share its experiences with people in other parts of the country, because it believes that this is one way of building a strong, nation-wide anti-fascist movement.

Campaign

Reading is a town of about 130,000 people. It has large Asian, Caribbean, Irish and other national minority communities. There are not many signs of open racist and fascist activities. On the surface the atmosphere seems calm. But in fact in this town, as in towns like Reading throughout the country, the rats are coming out of the sewers and are sharpening their teeth. The nazi National Front has stood candidates at parliamentary and council elections. The local press splashes "news" stories of fights involving black youth across the front page in order to whip up racial hatred. Unemployment is double what it was a year ago, and the racists are testing their ideas in our town to take advantage of this situation.

The people who started our campaign could see the spread of racist and fascist ideas in Reading. We decided not to wait to get organised until after the fascists had won a base of support through their lies. We believe that it is right to GET ORGANISED NOW, before the fascists are a great danger. We want to see

the people of Reading prepared to deal with them, learning what organisations like the National Front really stand for, and not allowing such organisations to grow.

Unity

Fascism and racism attack the working class more viciously than any other section of the people. BUT THEY ALSO ATTACK THE INTERESTS AND RIGHTS OF OTHER CLASSES AND SECTIONS OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE NOTHING TO GAIN FROM A POLICE STATE IN BRITAIN.... that is, everyone except the big monopoly capitalists and their closest supporters. We believe it would be wrong for RPARAF to mobilize only the working class in Reading. THIS WOULD GIVE THE FASCISTS A FREE HAND TO ORGANISE EVERYONE ELSE. So one feature of our campaign has been to try to unite everyone who can possibly be united against racism and fascism, whether they be industrial workers, both in and outside trade unions, office and shop workers, teachers and professional people, clergymen, shopkeepers, and even anti-racist capitalists. Only the working class can provide the stable foundation and leadership for an anti-fascist movement, but many people can and must be won to the side of the working class in this fight. This can be achieved if they are approached in an honest and principled way. In order to do this we have set our sights on producing an ACTION PROGRAMME which will really unite all who can be united.

Programme

With an Action Programme, which clearly sets out what we stand for, what are our demands, and how we are going to achieve our aims, our campaign will grow, not by fits and starts, but in a planned way; not by drifting from issue to issue or jumping on passing bandwagons, but step-by-step, taking all things into account; not by imagining that we already know all the problems on peoples' minds, but by carefully investigating peoples' views and their social conditions. We completely rejected the idea of a small committee just sitting down and dreaming up a "programme". It would not be worth the paper it was written on. To produce a real Action Programme that deals with the real problems caused by fascism and racism in Reading, and will really win people to supporting the campaign, we need to mix with people, find out what are the real problems and conditions, and then produce a programme and put it into action. Such a programme can only be given a proper and effective orientation if it takes into account in a living way the historical experience and the lessons currently being learned by progressive people fighting racism and fascism in other parts of the world. For example, we got much from studying a book called "For The Unity Of The Working Class Against Fascism" by Georgi Dimitrov. These are the things we have been doing since the campaign began.

National Front

Our campaign began when the National Front sold their newspaper "Britain First" in Reading Town Centre for the first time in April 1975. The Reading "Voice of the People" group invited various organisations and individuals to a meeting. This meeting agreed on three slogans around which we have organised, these are: "Fascists and Racists Out of Reading!", "Black and White Unite and Fight Racism and Fascism!", "No Freedom of Speech for the National Front Nazis!". A working committee was set up and a symbol agreed upon - one black and one white clenched fist. We also printed stickers with our slogans, and badges with our symbol. Large numbers of these have been sold.

RPARAF has been working in several ways. We arranged to contact and visit about thirty organisations and groups of the national minor-

ANTI-RACIST CAMPAIGN

continued from page 4

ities, such as black youth clubs, the Sikh temple, the Mosque and about thirty native English bodies, such as trade unions, social welfare organisations, churches and so on. In most cases we had difficulties in contacting the people involved apart from the leading members. However, when we have managed to meet large numbers of people, there has been a good response. We note down everything that people tell us about the problems that racism and fascism cause them, or of which they are aware, how they think these threats can be fought, and what they think of the campaign. There were quite a lot of problems inside the committee building the confidence and enthusiasm necessary for this work. But once people started to make these visits they saw that there was nothing to be afraid of; in fact they were enjoyable, and we are all convinced that the direct approach like this is the best way to contact such organisations.

Leaflets

We have also been involved in mass publicity. On two occasions in Reading town centre on a Saturday, we gave out thousands of leaflets, one exposing the nazi leaders of the National Front and the lies behind their race policies; the other was our statement of aims explaining why the above three slogans should be supported by the people of our town. For our public meeting and social, we produced four leaflets. The first was for general distribution, mainly in the town centre; there was one aimed at factory workers which we gave out before work and in the dinner break, and one aimed at school children and other young people, and finally we produced a leaflet aimed at Irish people, which we gave out outside several churches and in pubs where we know many Irish people go. We were surprised at the good response we got when handing out these leaflets, in fact most people were pleased to take them, and there were few hostile comments. We also produced three different posters, each with one of our slogans, together with a poster in Hindi, Punjabi and one in Urdu. Finally, we delivered by hand hundreds of letters to organisations and individuals enclosing our statement of aims.

Meeting

More than a hundred people came to our first public meeting held in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers hall in Reading on Friday 5th December. This was probably the first mass anti-racist meeting to be held in our town since the 1930's, and the numbers present were very encouraging taking into account the fact that previously there had been little militant and progressive political activity. Local reactionaries certainly took the campaign seriously as evidenced by a front page splash article published on the day of the public meeting in the "Reading Chronicle" which aimed at stopping people attending by slandering the organisers and distorting the campaign's objectives. The article also tried to use Mr De Pass, the local Community Relations Officer against the campaign by publishing his uninformed comments. In fact, RPARAF is affiliated to the local Community Relations Council. But more on this later.

Security at the meeting was handled by stewards, and in my opening remarks as chairman I made it quite clear that no disruption would be allowed. In the event the racists did not attend the meeting and so detailed plans for protecting our right to speak out did not have to be put into practice. RPARAF is determined that it will defend that right by any means necessary and will not allow its meetings to be disrupted by nazi elements.

It was necessary in my opening remarks to spell out the type of Reading we could see in the

future if a campaign like this failed - a divided community possibly existing in a police state. The first invited speaker on the platform was a Caribbean worker representing the "Voice of the People" newspaper. He made it clear which class wants a fascist state - the big capitalists - and he described the type of terrorist regime that fascism installs. He also explained how this is linked to the spread of racism. His speech was very well received. The second speaker, also from the Caribbean, had lived in Reading for several years, and he spoke of why he supported the campaign and its three slogans, especially the one opposing freedom of speech for the fascists. The last speaker, a white Englishwoman and RPARAF committee member, gave examples of how racist and fascist ideas are put across by the mass media of press, TV and radio. She then read out our Draft Programme of which everyone in the audience had a copy. It has three sections: what we stand for, what we demand, and action to be taken to support the line of the three main campaign slogans. Included with the programme was distributed a form to be sent to us with criticisms and comments.

Errors

There then followed a discussion from the floor; all speakers from the audience expressed their support for the campaign. Naturally there were some differences of emphasis on this or that point and some disagreement. This full and frank discussion was welcomed by the platform as the only way to sort out differences and gain clarity. The committee, from its experience, anticipated the possibility of an attack from the Right (which did not materialise) and an attack from the "left". The latter did materialise. A small group of people, their spokesman a member of International Socialism, a Trotskyite organisation, attacked the concept of mobilising "the people". The gist of his point was that only working class people, especially those from the trade union movement, should be organised to fight racism and fascism. Of course, workers in and out of the trade union movement must be mobilised because the racist and fascist offensive is directed mainly against the working class and we emphasise the leading role that workers must give. However, other classes and strata are objectively in contradiction with fascism - such as progressive middle class people, many students and the like - and it would be criminal to fail to actively enlist the support of such people in the campaign. The International Socialist position amounts to a left sectarian error as it would in practice deny to the working class allies in the anti-fascist fight and would leave these allies, many of them politically confused and presently at a low level of consciousness, at the mercy of racist and fascist propaganda. Another speaker made similar "leftist" points, for example implying that only socialists could fight fascism. This may sound very "left" but in fact is just a variation of the above mentioned theme. In the hall that night, probably the majority of people present were not socialists in the sense of being active militants, certainly not revolutionaries. Nevertheless they were anti-racist and must be found a place in the class struggle. This question is one hotly debated and we will return to this in greater detail in future campaign activities. But what is absolutely sure in the opinion of the working committee is that workers and anybody else who is prepared to support the campaign must be united and left sectarianism defeated. Interestingly, the same speaker went on to make a right opportunist error when he opposed the slogan "No Freedom of Speech for the National Front Nazis" because, he argued, it would not be supported by trades councils and other official trade union bodies. It is the committee's view that whilst it is necessary to go all out to win rank and file worker trade unionists to the campaign it is simultaneously necessary to use the above slogan to politically educate people and give the struggle a militant and correct

orientation; the fight for this correct orientation will, the committee well understands, necessitate a creative approach based on unity and struggle with organisations ideologically and politically limited by their reformist, social-democratic policies, such as many trades councils. A serious and scientific campaign will certainly degenerate politically if it lowers its demands and leading slogans to the point at which it abandons principles and its responsibility to give militant political leadership. The above combination of "left" and "right" opportunist errors will of course require further discussion but the committee stresses its desire to work with even those who hold those views while struggling against them.

Social

The social that followed the meeting was an important cultural/political event in its own right. It is rare to see a large number of people, black and white, workers and others, young and old, getting together in a relaxed atmosphere on the basis of anti-fascist unity. The bar, food and raffle all contributed to the evening but the high spots came with performances from "The Asian Musical Group" from Reading, and the "Voice of the People" Folk Group which sang six anti-fascist songs, some of them new. The words of "They Shall Not Pass", an anti-fascist anthem especially written for the occasion, were distributed, and people enthusiastically joined in the singing.

Events such as the one I have described, were they to take place up and down the country, would produce the type of unity that will be capable of giving a real, militant lead to the fight to smash the racist and fascist offensive. Also, such broad front activities will introduce a large number of people to the socialist movement and these can be helped with scientific political education and will be able to take their place in the ranks of revolutionaries who want basic social change, a socialist society where the working class has state political power. This is what reactionaries everywhere fear right down to their rotten guts. . . . the unity of the people under working class leadership scares them stiff. The "Reading Chronicle" provides yet more truth of this, as after the successful public meeting it published a distortion of events and even went to the length of publishing a picture of the house in Reading where a prominent local anti-fascist lives with his wife and family. The message to the fascists was clear: here is where he lives, why not do something about it?

Future

But the campaign will go, we hope, from strength to strength. WE HAVE LAUNCHED INTO 1976 AS A YEAR OF ANTI-RACIST, ANTI-FASCIST STRUGGLE IN READING. We are working hard towards a second public meeting at which our democratic constitution will be put forward and a finished ACTION PROGRAMME will be discussed after everybody's views have been studied. Meanwhile we are carrying on popularising the draft programme, investigating and meeting new people. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO BUILD. We reject the idea of just fighting fascism in our town and would like to hear from other people who want a nation-wide campaign. The start we have made must now be built upon. Finally, our committee wishes to express a lot of thanks to the "Voice of the People" newspaper and the workers who produce it for having helped us in a number of ways: we know the VOP has its own problems; we also know that it will solve them and that it is a real asset to the working class and other progressive people in this country.

One last note: anyone wanting to contact us can do it either through your address (see back page, VOP) or direct by writing to RPARAF, c/o 6, Foundry Street, Reading, Berkshire, enclosing a stamp.

PLEASE NOTE: VOP will be reporting on the campaign in future issues