

Black History Month 2009

REMEMBER AND CONTINUE THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM

Unite the Union pays tribute to those who fought racism and fascism over the years, highlighting key events since the 1930s. Our union has always stood out against racism and fascism and we continue the fight today by raising awareness on fascism amongst our members, tackling racism in the workplace and wider society and supporting anti-fascist organisations.



1930's/40's

BACKGROUND

- Growing Jewish population, with the biggest community living in the East End of London
- 1932-Oswald Mosley, the Leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) waged a hate campaign against Jewish people and others and terrorised Jewish stall-holders in the East End
- With their growing popularity, BUF organised a rally in 1934 at Olympia. However, this was to start their downfall as the 12,000 audience watched in shock as the 'blackshirt' stewards violently attacked hecklers. Within a year their membership fell from 40000 to 5000
- Large anti-Jewish riots took place around the country in 1947
- At the invitation of the British Government, the Empire Windrush ship brought over Caribbean workers in 1948 to rebuild industries such as the NHS, British Rail and London Transport

LABOUR MOVEMENT, TRADE UNION & COMMUNITY RESPONSE

- Trade unionists, Socialists, Jewish people (particularly the 43 Group), Communists and others confronted the fascists
- The National Joint Council (later National Council of Labour) was established which included TUC, Labour Party & Co-operative Movement and they launched an Anti-fascist campaign with mass demonstrations
- The Battle of Cable Street in 1938 highlighted the strength of anti-fascists, with nearly 500,000 marching & carrying banners
- The International Workers Federation and trade unionists organised resistance to fascism and the Nazis in Germany
- Following Mosley's arrest and then release from prison, one million people signed up in protest against his release, including trade union branches, Jewish and anti-fascist organisations

1950's/60's

BACKGROUND

- Many Caribbean migrants arrived in London and they faced hostility and familiar signs of 'No blacks, No dogs, No Irish'
- Asian people from the sub-continent were recruited to mills in the North of England
- Migrant workers faced systematic discrimination and were often given the worst jobs and the worst pay
- Immigration controls were tightened in 1962 and a new Race Relations Act was enforced in 1965 (later followed by the Race Relations Act 1974) which outlawed racial discrimination in employment and housing
- Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968 played on people's fears and encouraged everyone to believe that Britain would be overrun by immigrants

LABOUR MOVEMENT, TRADE UNION & COMMUNITY RESPONSE

- There was now a mixed picture, with some unions calling for West Indian bus drivers to be excluded from the country
- Workers, students and organisations such as the Indian Workers Association, Pakistani Welfare Association and Movement for Colonial Freedom marched against the Government's 'colour bar' Immigration Bill.
- Due to the rise in fascist activities, Searchlight Association (later to publish Searchlight Magazine) was established in 1962 to combat racism and fascism
- In Bristol, it took a bus boycott led by black activist Paul Stephenson and the involvement of national TGWU Officers, to force employers and the local union to accept black workers on the buses in 1963
- The Notting Hill Carnival was set up in 1964 by the black community to celebrate their own cultures and traditions
- Following Enoch Powell's speech, a stronger anti-racism movement was forged, including the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism

1970's/80's

BACKGROUND

- The Black and Asian community was established and growing, with 27,000 Asians expelled from Uganda arriving in 1972
- Support for the National Front, an organisation calling for an all white Britain, was on the rise, gaining 16.3% of the vote in the West Bromwich by-election in 1973
- 1976 Race Relations Act came into force along with the establishment of the Commission for Race Equality
- Blair Peach, a teacher, was killed at an Anti-Nazi League (ANL) demonstration in 1979
- Race Riots took place in 1981 in Brixton, Toxteth in Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham and Bradford. The Scarman report into the riots blamed racial discrimination and disadvantage and called for urgent action
- The British National Party (BNP), a far Right, 'whites only' political party was formed in 1982 as a splinter group of the National Front

LABOUR MOVEMENT, TRADE UNION & COMMUNITY RESPONSE

- Many unions and workers played a part in the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), including workers at British Leyland Longbridge, Fords, Dagenham, Yorkshire Miners and others
- Rock against Racism was formed in response to the growth of nationalist groups like the National Front
- In 1971 the Black People Alliance, supported by unions and Asian organisations, demonstrated against the Immigration Bill and it was hailed as the "biggest ever race demonstration in Britain"
- Local and national community groups such as the Bangladeshi Youth Movement for Equal Rights, Newham Monitoring Project and Southall Black Sisters gained strength and support

1990's/2000's

BACKGROUND

- Stephen Lawrence was murdered by young racists in Eltham in 1993
- The BNP won a council seat with the election of Derek Beackon in Tower Hamlets in 1993 under the slogan of "Rights for Whites." This signalled a turn in the BNP's policy from confrontation on the streets to a bid for electoral respectability
- Race riots took place in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, following racist provocations, abuse & attacks on Asian businesses, cars & homes
- The European Union admitted 10 more countries, giving many more people the right to work in Britain. Many of these workers, particularly those employed by agencies, faced poor working conditions and bad housing
- In the 2009 European elections, two BNP MEPs were elected

LABOUR MOVEMENT, TRADE UNION & COMMUNITY RESPONSE

- Following the Tower Hamlets election results, the local church groups, the ANL and the Asian community helped in making sure that Beackon lost his seat in 1994
- After strong campaigning by Stephen Lawrence's parents, trade unions and others, in 1999 an inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence led by William MacPherson, highlighted institutionalised racism in the police force and recommendations led to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, focusing on the public sector. The TUC set up the Stephen Lawrence Task Group, challenging workplace racism
- In 2003 Unite Against Fascism (UAF) was formed, supported by many MPs, the TUC, trade unions and others. UAF's successful sister campaign, Love Music Hate Racism carries on the tradition of using music to organise against racism and fascism.
- Searchlight's successful 'Hope Not Hate Campaign' started in 2007 celebrating modern Britain, touring all parts of the country, mobilising activists and distributing information
- Many unions protested against the unfair treatment of migrant workers and worked to organise them into their unions. The Gangmasters Licensing Act came about mainly as a result of strong union campaigning to stop unscrupulous employment agencies
- Demonstrations followed the election of BNP MEPs in 2009 with Searchlight developing a postcard campaign, "Not in My Name", signed by thousands, which was delivered to the European Parliament and Unite Against Fascism calling to urgently build a broad anti-fascist movement within communities
- Unite the Union continues to fight against fascism and racism working with the TUC, local communities and anti-fascist organisations

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