For black liberation and socialism: an action programme against racism

Wed, 01/03/1995 - 18:00

The fight against racism and for black liberation is a working class fight. Only the working class, black and white, has a consistent interest in defeating racism once and for all;

The successful conclusion of the fight against racism, and for black liberation, is impossible without socialist revolution.

On the basis of these two principles, verified time and again in the history of black struggles against oppression, we construct our programme to combat racism and to win black liberation.

Our programme for black workers is, therefore, equally our programme for the whole working class. Even where particular demands for ending a particular aspect of oppression are specific to black workers, white workers have an interest in supporting such demands since they will help eradicate racism and forge class wide unity.

Likewise, the general demands of our socialist programme are fully applicable to all black workers. The revolutionary socialist programme is a programme for the entire class. What we present here is a focused action programme to combat racism.

Fight State Racism

The capitalist state serves the capitalist class, whether under a Tory or Labour government. The state has introduced legal measures against racial discrimination, but only in order to disguise its real and fundamental racist character.

For every ?equal opportunity? policy there are ten racist measures aimed at subjugating black people and maintaining divisions in the working class. Immigration controls, nationality acts, deportation camps and a racist police force - all of these constitute state-sponsored institutionalised racism.

While we support any real progressive legal measures that help curb racism we say to black workers, don?t rely on the state that maintains racism to be the state that frees you from the scourge of racism. The whole working class must fight to:

Smash all immigration controls!

All immigration controls are racist. They are designed to stop black people coming in and to make black people who live here live in fear. All such controls are aimed at blaming racism on black people by perpetuating the idea that there are ?too many? black people, that they must be kept out, that those who live here are really ?aliens".

Capital roves the world freely in search of profit. But workers seeking better pay and conditions, or an
escape from war, famine and repression, are denied that right by capitalism?s immigration laws. Every immigration and nationality act should be repealed.

The Asylum Act is one of these reactionary laws, stigmatising people fleeing repressive regimes as ?bogus? applicants for refugee status. This racist law is consistent with the British state?s traditions - a state which kept out Jews fleeing Nazi Germany because they were ?bogus? applicants for refugee status. It must scrapped along with all the immigration laws.

**Fight all deportations!**
Close down Campsfield and every other immigration detention centre! Disband all police and civil service units organised to enforce or process deportations!

In their bid to maintain racism the capitalist state uses its immigration laws as a justification for the relentless persecution of black people. Special police units are deployed to hunt black people thought to be ?illegal immigrants”. Barbaric methods of enforcement are used, resulting in death and injury. Joy Gardner was murdered while the state was trying to deport her. Her murderers walked free from court.

The entire working class must meet every threatened deportation with action, up to and including strikes. Immigration controls begin with White Papers in parliament. They end with gags and manacles and with concentration camps like Campsfield.

**Full rights for migrant workers**
Alongside immigration controls the state uses a system of work permits to both exclude foreign workers and harass and intimidate them when they are allowed to stay in Britain for short periods of super-exploitation at the hands of ruthless bosses.

And, while such workers are here they are denied every elementary civil and democratic right. If they are made to work in dangerous conditions, or to work for miserable wages, they have no right to protest. They can be flung out of the country at the whim of their boss. All restrictions on migrant workers must be scrapped.

They must have equal rights with British citizens while they are resident. They must have the right to join unions. And unions should undertake special campaigns to recruit, organise and defend such workers. The work permit system must be abolished.

**Abolish all internal controls**
To maintain the climate of fear and intimidation of black people the state uses the education system, the NHS and housing allocation services to maintain checks on black people. Data is compiled which is used to harass black people, stigmatise them and aid the police and special immigration units in their grisly work.

Faced with demands to relax border controls inside the European Union, the state is preparing massive increases in internal controls to compensate for this, including a proposed identity card and the legal obligation for employers to report suspected illegal immigrants. All such internal controls should be abolished. The unions must refuse to co-operate with their use by state agencies.

**Fight police harassment**
The entire police force is an instrument of racist harassment of black people. The ?canteen culture? of racism in the police begins with jokes and ends with beatings and killings. No amount of recruitment of black officers will change this.

The police are not a neutral force in capitalist society who can be humanised or democratised or made
accountable to the community. The police are defenders of the capitalist state and its racist system. They are backed up by the courts whose judges and magistrates will always treat black people as potential muggers, drug dealers and gangsters.

Black people have the right to fight every aspect of this daily harassment and to stop the state criminalising whole communities. To wage this fight we demand:

- The right to organise black self defence against police and other racist attacks
- The scrapping of the Criminal Justice Act and Criminal Evidence Act, which give police the right to stop and search on ?suspicion? -these are new ?sus laws? and they are used to terrorise black youth
- The abolition of all the special immigration, tactical support and other units which are at the front line of the state?s offensive against black people against the utopia of controlling the police, through accountability or democratisation, we fight for workers? self defence organisations, which can protect working class communities from racist attack and deal with criminal and anti-social elements within those communities
- Against the investigation of racist beating and murders by the Police Complaints Authority, we fight to get state recognition of inquiries, independent of the state, into such incidents, constituted from elected representatives from working class and anti-racist organisations of the black community, the labour movement and anti-racist legal experts
- Against the ingrained prejudice of a judicial system that criminalises black people we are for the election of all judges and magistrates, as a basic democratic measure and for the right to have a minimum of 50% of black people on juries in cases where the defendants are black; but even with these reforms the racist justice system can never become class neutral - and just as we are for workers? defence organisations we are also for workers? tribunals.

- All drugs should be legalised and made available under a state monopoly. We demand the provision of health education and high quality services for dependants and users. The state monopoly could replace the current gangsters? monopoly. By removing their source of wealth and power the hold of drug gangs over working class estates and black communities can be broken. The police use the fact that all drugs are illegal to harass and criminalise black people and working class youth in general. Hard drugs, like heavy drinking, can ruin people?s lives. But criminalisation is no answer, just an excuse for repression. Youth who want drugs can get them, no matter if they are ?hard? or ?soft". The cycle of excessive drug taking, dependence and criminality will only be broken when black people are free of racist harassment and all people can make informed choices about drug uses.

End Discrimination

Institutionalised racism, sponsored by the state, leads directly to discrimination in all fields of life for black people. Whether in jobs, wages or housing allocation, black people are pushed to the bottom of the pile.

The colour bar may not be as obvious as it was in the 1950s and job adverts may carry the equal opportunities logo, but the discrimination is every bit as real. We must organise in the here and now to fight against discrimination.

Abolish discrimination in jobs through workers? control of hiring and firing.

Capitalism?s equal opportunities have little effect. Racist bosses may well employ ?quotas? of black people, but then deny them promotion. Only workers? control can ensure real equality in the allocation of jobs.
Fight racism in the workplaces
Without a fight against racism amongst white workers black people will still find themselves harassed and subject to super-exploitation. Trade unions must adopt policies that ensure workers’ control of hiring and firing is free from racism.

This means systematic campaigns in the workplaces, paid for and run by the unions, discipline against workers guilty of racist practice and action against bosses guilty of the same. It means carrying through this control to ensure that black people are not condemned to low paid jobs and prevented from winning promotion.

End discrimination in housing allocation and other social services
Capitalism turns workers against each other, making them fight over a diminishing pool of resources through cuts and capping. While fighting for workers’ budgets in every town and borough to meet the needs of all workers, it is vital that workers’ control over housing allocation and service provision is instituted to unite the struggle of all workers for decent housing and services and to eliminate the local apartheid systems that have created ghettos and intensified divisions between black and white workers.

For a unified comprehensive and secular education system funded by the state to meet the needs of the working class.
The racism in the education system has encouraged many black people to see separate or religious schools as the means of getting their children a decent education.

This is understandable but wrong. Religious schools indoctrinate children in reactionary mysticism and separate schools obstruct revolutionary integration. There should be no state funding for any religious schools - and that includes Catholic, Church of England and Jewish, as well as Islamic. Teacher, parent, student and labour movement control of comprehensive education can eliminate the discrimination that black students suffer.

Education must be anti-racist, not multicultural. A massive programme to eradicate racist attitudes amongst teachers and students should be funded by the state. All racist discrimination in assessment procedures must be abolished. Discipline of black students should be monitored by trade unions and parents’ representatives to ensure it is not carried out as a result of racist prejudices.

Teaching in the mother tongue or community language of black people should be provided as part of language teaching. Community liaison officers, who can speak the language of the community with whom they are liaising must be funded by the state.

The practice of discriminating against black people through state and police powers under Mental Health Acts must be abolished. The 1983 Act is a mental health ‘sus law’ that has massively discriminated against black people.

We support provisions in education and local government for positive action to overcome difficulties, as in the case of language problems etc. However, we oppose the element implicit in Section 11 of overcoming ‘customs or culture barriers.’

Similarly, we are against educational resources for Commonwealth children being operated differently and separately from those provided by local authorities’ educational departments for all other children. We defend Section 11 additional funding under threat of cuts, but this funding should be part of mainstream education.

We fight for full assistance, funded within an expanded education budget, to meet special language and
other needs, of all immigrants from the Commonwealth and beyond. We are for the right of teachers and other Section 11 workers to retain their jobs on the same terms and conditions and for these jobs to be part of mainstream education.

For women?s liberation! For lesbian and gay liberation!
Racism feeds the oppression of women. Black women suffer a double burden of oppression and are frequently the most exploited section of the workforce. They are victims of sexism within their own communities as a result of cultural or religious legacies. While we are against the state denying the right of Muslim female students wearing the veil to school or college, we are for a campaign within the black communities against such symbols of women?s oppression.

We are against arranged marriages and the segregation of girls from boys in education. We are for the right to free contraception and abortion on demand for all women, black and white, and are for state financed health education programmes aimed at black women to prevent them from having their fertility controlled by men.

We are for the right of women to be treated by women doctors if they require it. We are for the provision of 24 hour creche facilities to enable women to work. Women are especially vulnerable to deportation. They are threatened with deportation if they leave violent partners. It is a direct attack on women?s right to an independent life and to choose where and with whom she lives. Women have fought back against these controls. All such struggles must be supported by the labour movement.

Likewise we are for a fight against every aspect of oppression suffered by black lesbians and gay men. The right to choose your sexual orientation free from persecution, should be a basic human right. It isn?t. It is thwarted at every turn. It is a right that must be fought for by the whole workers? movement.

For the complete separation of church and state
Religion is no solution to racism. The attack on Salman Rushdie by sections of the Asian community shows that it can be a dangerous diversion from the fight against racism.

We are against the persecution of any religion and are in favour of the right of all to practice the religion of their choice, including the right to special diets at school and work, the right to dress in accordance with religious beliefs and the right to time and resources at schools for religious observations. But we are against any state funding to religious schools and institutions.

We are for the abolition of all blasphemy laws, not their equalisation. Racism is the problem, not writers like Salman Rushdie. We support the struggles of groups such as Women Against Fundamentalism, against repression and persecution. We are for the repeal of all Education Acts that oblige schools to hold Christian assemblies or give preferential treatment to the Christian faith over others. Religion should not be taught in schools except as part of the study of human ideas and societies.

[b]End the discrimination against black youth
Like women black youth face a double oppression. They are the most likely to be unemployed, to be stopped and searched, to be beaten up by racist gangs and the police. Black youth have a world to win. The struggle against the racism faced by black youth can best be fought through the building of a mass revolutionary youth movement encompassing black and white youth in a common struggle against racism and for socialism.

[b]Racist attacks - we fight back!
Even the doctored statistics of the police reveal that there is a racist attack in Britain every 28 minutes.
Black people are beaten and killed because of the colour of their skin.

The scars and the corpses are a gruesome indictment of capitalism. And while the politicians may wring their hands at such instances of street racism, those hands are stained with the blood of the victims. It is the racist capitalist system, its racist mouthpieces in the media, its laws and its police who legitimise this reign of terror.

**For the right to black self defence**

When black people organise in their communities to resist racist attacks the ?even-handed? police arrest them and the courts imprison them. Against this we say, self defence is no offence. It is a basic right. It is one that needs to be implemented through organisation, through self-defence squads capable of meeting racist violence with anti-racist violence.

**Labour movement support for black self-defence and for workers? defence squads**

The entire working class has a responsibility to fight racist attacks. The labour movement all too often turns to the police for protection, only to find their own heads being bashed in on marches and pickets. The labour movement must pledge support to self-defence organisations in the black communities and build its own workers? defence squads to help fight racism.

**No platform for fascists**

Fascist organisations like the British National Party (BNP) and Combat 18, are the shock troops of racism. Their policies of race hate are part and parcel of their entire anti-working class programme. They cannot be reasoned with: their policies are the policies of hate.

We cannot respect their ?democratic rights? since they are organisations dedicated to denying the democratic rights of the whole working class, and to genocide against black people.

They must be fought, by black and white workers - and denied any rights whatsoever. We need a workers? united front dedicated to denying the fascists a public platform. They have to be driven off the streets by force, using organised defence squads backed up by mass action.

**Revolutionary internationalism**

Capitalism is a world wide system. It was built on the broken bones of the black slaves and the people of the colonial empires. It must be fought world wide, by an international revolutionary socialist party.

Schemes for voluntary repatriation or resettlement as, for example, Bernie Grant, the black Labour MP, recently proposed are a diversion from the struggle. They are a terrible capitulation to racism. Calls for reparations from the western governments for the crimes of the past serve no useful purpose.

Who will pay for those crimes and who will be paid? In Africa many of the regimes are corrupt: all are capitalist. If the money goes to them, the masses will never see it.

No, the way to fight racism is to say: here to stay, here to fight, as black youth have chanted on demonstration after demonstration. And the way to avenge the crimes against black people in the past is to fight imperialism today.

We are for the fight to cancel the debts of the Third World countries to the imperialist countries and their agencies like the IMF, debts which are paid for by the masses of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

We are for the return of all the treasures stolen by British imperialism from its former colonies and spheres of influence and for them to be placed under the control of the workers? movements in those countries.
Above all we are for 100% support to all movements or countries who come into conflict with imperialism.

Practically, this means actively supporting such countries in a war against imperialism, as we did with Argentina against Britain and Iraq against the imperialist-led Coalition. At the same time we have to support the movements of workers and peasants against the reactionary regimes that rule such countries. It means demanding that Britain withdraws all of the troops it has stationed around the globe, including in Northern Ireland. Those troops are there to defend imperialism. They should get out.

**Purge racism from the labour movement!**

Only the working class can destroy capitalism, and with it racism. Yet the labour movement has not escaped the prejudices that permeate class society.

Unions and the Labour Party are riven with racism. The handful of black MPs and the election of Bill Morris as leader of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) have not eradicated these prejudices. Indeed, the Labour Party is a party that has implemented vicious immigration laws. The unions have tolerated informal colour bars in the workplaces. Both the Labour and union leaders are enemies of black self organisation, whatever their talk of quotas and racial harmony.

**For black caucuses!**

Black workers in the unions and the Labour party should have the right to caucus. This is not separatism, as the bureaucrats claim. The fact that black workers are amongst the most densely unionised section of the population and have the largest number of Labour voters shows this charge to be both a lie and a racist slur.

These workers have proved their loyalty to the workers’ movement far more than John Monks of the TUC and Tony Blair of the Labour party ever have. The right to caucus within the workers’ movement is a way of allowing black workers to organise to fight racism in the unions.

**For national, black-only caucuses in the unions**

At a national level, black members’ conferences should be black-only if they are to serve as effective national caucuses. We support the fight to make the TUC Black Workers’ Conference a black-only delegate conference. This does not absolve the TUC from organising black and white workers together in an anti-racist struggle, including national conferences, demonstrations and campaigns.

At the same time we reject the call for three reserved seats on the general council of the TUC to be elected by the Black Workers Conference. In individual unions the same applies to reserved seats on the NECs.

The General Council of the TUC, like the NECs of individual unions, not only decide on issues concerning black workers.

The General Council should be the ‘general staff’ of the whole workers’ movement, elected by a democratically convened Congress and accountable to it, and through that to the whole movement. And union NECs should be elected by the whole membership, including any reserved seats for black members (or women) so that they too can be held to account by the whole membership.

**For a massive campaign against racism in the labour movement**

The battle against racist ideas needs to be constantly waged to counter the prevalent prejudices of society. Instead of weekend luxury teach-ins for bureaucrats, there should be a systematic campaign to educate shop stewards and rank and file members against racism.

Drive active racists and fascists out of the unions and Labour Party
Fascists want to destroy the workers’ movement. They should never be allowed to be part of it. Racists come in different guises. Active racists, those who preach and organise racist policies within the labour movement, must be driven out as well.

Such people must be barred from holding any positions within the unions and, if, despite discipline, they cannot be broken from their prejudices, they should be expelled from the unions and from the Labour Party.

Labour must fight racism
Labour governments have repaid the support given to them by black workers with racist laws, with virginity tests on immigrant women, with the use of the police against black strikers and communities.

This must be fought. Black and white workers must demand that Labour pledges its support to black self defence, repeals all immigration controls, and replaces the Commission for Racial Equality with an anti-racist National Convention comprising delegates from the labour movement and from the fighting anti-racist organisations of the black communities in Britain.

Separatism is not the answer
The complicity of the Labour and trade union leaders in maintaining the racist system has led some black activists to reject the building of common political organisations with white workers. This is a big mistake.

The black working class of Britain constitutes, at most, six per cent of the population. To overthrow racist capitalism the closest unity of the working class majority will be necessary. Our support for the right of black workers to organise within the workers’ movement, to identify and challenge racism, is aimed at strengthening the unity of the working class.

We do not support the building of separate black political parties or unions.

We reject separatism and insist on both the possibility and the necessity of black and white workers uniting in the struggle against racism and capitalism.

For an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement in the unions
The trade union bureaucracy, and this includes Bill Morris, exists to mediate between workers and bosses. This job sets the bureaucrats apart from the mass of workers and gives them privileges over those workers.

These privileges give them a stake in maintaining the capitalist system. Without this system they would be out of a job. In the end it is this material interest, rather than any personality defects, that push them to betray the struggles of the workers they represent.

Their stake in the society that exploits those workers leads them to side with it, ultimately, whenever workers clash with it.

They must be overthrown if the unions are to be changed from undemocratic organisations of compromise into democratic, fighting organisations of class struggle. Black workers have a direct interest in the fight for a rank and file movement - helping to oust a bureaucracy that is a prop of a racist society.

For a revolutionary workers’ party
Labour remains the party of the trade unions, despite Blair’s charge to the right. But it is really the party of the union bureaucracy, every bit as committed to the capitalist system as that bureaucracy.

At best it promotes the mild reform of the capitalist system. And as such it acts to defend that system, including that system’s racism.
While we are in favour of a fight to make Labour act in the interests of the working class, we believe it will never do so in a consistent fashion.

We fight to put it into office and demand it act in the workers’ interests so that it can be put to the test in front of the millions of workers, including black workers, who look to it. But that fight is part of the fight to build a different type of party.

We want a revolutionary party, part of a Revolutionary Communist International, committed to the worldwide fight against the class system that breeds, nurtures and sustains racism.

We want a party comprising the most militant fighters against capitalism and racism.

We believe that black workers have a leading role to play in that party. It is a party that will be committed not just to the action programme we have outlined here, but to the general revolutionary socialist programme aimed at:

The destruction of capitalism and its state

their replacement by a state based on democratic workers’ councils and a workers’ militia and an economy planned to meet working class needs not the profit margins of a handful of bosses.

We call on all workers to join us in the fight to build that party, so that we can bring nearer the day when humanity will look upon racism as crime of the past, not a permanent feature of the present.

Source URL: https://fifthinternational.org/content/black-liberation-and-socialism-action-programme-against-racism