

# 18 years since Stephen Lawrence murder We still need to fight racism... and cuts

Onay Kasab

Two men are now to stand trial for the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the black teenager who had ambitions to become an architect but was killed in a vicious racist attack in 1993.

Stephen's only 'crime' had been the colour of his skin and waiting at a bus stop at night. His violent death shocked local people – some of his friends broke down in tears at his college and hundreds joined vigils by the bus stop where he was murdered.

Anti-racist campaigners across the country will greet the news of the trial with relief and some satisfaction. The original investigation by the police was bungled and a public inquiry found that "institutional racism" within the police force had plagued the initial case. As Doreen Lawrence, Stephen's mother, told the press: "Perhaps, somewhere down the line we will get justice for him."

Back in 1993, the media dubbed the Greenwich area the "race hate capital of Britain". This south London borough also saw the murder of two other young black men, Rolan Adams and Rohit Duggal in racially motivated killings, along with a 300% rise in racist attacks in the borough.

It was no coincidence that the far-right racist British National Party (BNP) set up its headquarters, in the guise of a 'bookshop', in a building on Greenwich's borough borders. The campaigns for justice for the murdered Stephen Lawrence and campaigns demanding the removal of the BNP HQ organised several demonstrations, including mass marches.

Young Socialist Party members had initiated Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) in 1992. They played a leading role in ensuring that the BNP HQ was closed down.

YRE organised the demonstrations in 1993 through work in colleges and the trade unions, including ensuring measures were taken to defend the marchers from police

attack.

These mass demonstrations, together with hard work by anti-racists, particularly the YRE, led to a public inquiry. This in turn led to the legal decision that forced Bexley council, where the HQ was situated, to close the BNP HQ.

## Racism today

The decision to try these men, 18 years after Stephen Lawrence's murder, will be welcomed by anti-racism campaigners. However it may unfortunately have limited impact on the day-to-day racism faced by black men and women and Asian and migrant workers.

If realised the government's cuts programme, carried out locally by councils, such as Greenwich's Labour council, will mean severe pain for millions.

Labour agrees with the Con-Dems that working class people must pay the price. With everyone being affected there is potential for a mass, united struggle of all workers and young people.

However, capitalist politicians, desperate to divert blame from themselves, will try to encourage divisions in this movement and make migrant workers scapegoats for the lack of jobs, housing and services.

Greenwich council's cuts alone amount to over £64 million. Service cuts will hit children's, youth and adults' services. Given the large concentration of black and Asian people in the public sector, and the high levels of unemployment among black and Asian youth, ethnic minority and migrant workers will be disproportionately harder hit by the cuts in jobs and public services. Nonetheless they could also be scapegoated for the cuts.

In a February speech prime minister David Cameron laid the blame for many of society's problems on 'multiculturalism'. This public attack, at the same time as the racist English Defence League were holding a demonstration, shows he is trying to transfer the blame for the crisis from the bankers, fat-cat bosses and capitalist governments onto



YRE protest against the BNP in 1993 photo the Socialist

migrant workers. Growing racism can affect all black and Asian workers.

This shameful attempt to shift the blame can be cut across by united campaigns against cuts. Trade unions and communities in genuine mass campaigns can win the necessary funding for jobs and services. This would unite workers in action while cutting across racist arguments.

This can have a huge effect on the consciousness of workers. Just look at the huge impact that campaigns for justice and against the BNP HQ

had on the consciousness of workers and youth, not just in Greenwich but way beyond the borough.

The rise in black workers' confidence in 1993 was illustrated on the mass demonstration through Welling when black youth chanted "too black, too strong".

But it should never be forgotten that the demonstrations were neither majority black, nor majority white. The justice campaigns and the fight against the BNP HQ were good examples of class unity against racism.

They went beyond chanting

"black and white unite and fight" - they provided real solid examples of turning slogans into action. YRE stressed that unemployment, lack of housing and growing queues in the cash-strapped NHS were the breeding grounds of racism and the far right - they still are. YRE put forward a class unity programme.

Now, 18 years later, we again need to build a movement, uniting our class to fight against the cuts. This would cut across the poisonous racist ideas that lead to murderous attacks on young people because of the colour of their skin.

## Yorkshire meetings make Jarrow plans

Matt Whale

YFJ unemployed organiser

Yorkshire Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) held a successful weekend with a regional YFJ conference on Saturday 28 May and a national Jarrow marchers' meeting on Sunday 29 May.

The conference, attended by 30 people, brought together the most militant young trade unionists, students and unemployed young people in the region.

We had a detailed discussion on the plight of young workers and the need to support the proposed strike action over pensions on 30 June. Key points of action to come out of the discussion were working to unionise work places and to develop a proper network of young members' officers of trade unions in the region.

The conference then voted on democratic structures for the campaign in Yorkshire, electing a regional organiser and steering committee.

On Sunday around 35 people attended the Jarrow marchers meeting. Groups from across England and Wales met to discuss the Jarrow march for jobs and what needs to be done to organise it. Two journalists attended the meeting including a film director who wants to do a documentary of the march.

Paul Callanan, national organiser of YFJ, introduced the meeting on the current situation facing young people and why the march is needed.

A lively discussion followed with reports on how the situation is hitting all young people; graduates, school leavers and those in employment. A group from Barnado's children's charity in Newcastle proposed writing and recording a song to do with the Jarrow march which was well received.

Ben Robinson, YFJ national chair, then talked about the more logistical issues of the march. He also described the support we've received so far with £10,000 of our £26,000 funding target reached through support from trade unions.

Regions then reported on their plans to publicise and build support for the march. These included gigs, meetings, a 'mini Jarrow' in Wales on 29-30 July, and plans to approach trade unions for accommodation and food for marchers along the route.

The meeting then broke into regional caucuses to make detailed plans for the build up to the march and events during the march itself, particularly in areas that it will pass through.

There were suggestions for regional committees with Jarrow organisers in each city, feeder marches, Skype link-ups with the marchers at solidarity protests and meetings and making sure that marchers are mentally and physically prepared for the challenge!

The weekend was a huge success for Yorkshire YFJ and we raised more money for the Jarrow-meter. All who attended left looking forward to the Jarrow march and feeling prepared to spend the next few months working hard to make it a success.

## Join the Jarrow march for jobs!

75 years ago, 200 unemployed men from Jarrow marched from their home town in South Tyneside to London. Youth Fight for Jobs is retracing their steps this October and marching for a genuine solution to youth unemployment. We demand free, decent education and real training on trade union agreed rates of pay that leads to a guaranteed socially useful job at the end. If you want to help by marching, fundraising or organising a protest as part of the march, get in touch:

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