

UK Independence Party launches racist poster campaign

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Professions of outrage in the media have greeted racist statements by leaders of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in elections for the European Parliament and local councils next month.

Sunday saw banner headlines denouncing the UKIP's William Henwood, candidate for local elections in Enfield, London. Henwood had suggested that comedian Lenny Henry should emigrate to a "black country". This was in response to Henry's complaint that ethnic minorities are unrepresented on British television.

Henwood later defended his remarks by saying, "I think if black people come to this country and don't like mixing with white people why are they here? If he [Henry] wants a lot of blacks around go and live in a black country."

Other UKIP candidates have reportedly taken to social media sites to denounce Islam as "organised crime under religious camouflage", for example.

The official media outrage directed at these statements must be viewed critically. It occurs only days after the UKIP launched its European election poster campaign amidst a barrage of media publicity.

The posters are racist anti-immigrant propaganda in the guise of opposition to the European Union (EU). One shows a man dressed as a builder begging on the street. The caption declares: "EU policy at work. British builders are hit hard by unlimited cheap labour." Other posters suggest that the crisis in jobs and wages is due to the limited freedom of movement within the EU. In one, echoing First World War propaganda imagery, a finger points at the reader while the caption asks: "26 million people in Europe are looking for work. And whose jobs are they after?"

Other posters target the EU, with the suggestion that 75 percent of British laws are made in Brussels and

alleging that British taxpayers are funding a "celebrity lifestyle" of EU bureaucrats. In response, party leader Nigel Farage makes a great play of the UKIP representing "ordinary" Britons against a bureaucratic political establishment.

The hypocrisy is transparent. In 2012, the UKIP's nine Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) claimed an average of £35,635 each in "general expenditure allowances" on top of their £79,000 salary, travel expenses and daily subsistence allowance.

Farage has defended the poster campaign as "a hard-hitting reflection of reality as it is experienced by millions of British people struggling to earn a living outside the Westminster bubble."

Media commentary on the poster campaign largely focussed on the fact that the unemployed "builder" was, in fact, an actor, and an Irish one at that, while a woman who appeared in another as an ordinary voter turned out to be the UKIP's event manager.

There was virtually no comment on the fact that the UKIP's poster campaign is an open attempt to shift attention away from the underlying causes of the economic catastrophe facing millions by scapegoating migrant workers for these conditions.

Farage's claim that the UKIP is "a nonsectarian, non-racist political party" was reported as good coin, while his attempts to distance his party from organisations such as the National Front in France, by criticising its "prejudice and anti-Semitism," went largely unchallenged.

That Farage has previously praised Le Pen for her "good qualities" and for "achieving remarkable things" is a matter of record, as is the fact that the UKIP sits in the European Parliament with the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) fraction. Other far-right parties in the EFD include Greece's Laos Party, which has a

record of anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and anti-immigrant chauvinism. Also present are Italy's Lega Nord, which has a reputation for racist abuse of immigrants, and the Slovakian National Party (SNS), a descendant of a Nazi collaborationist group during the Second World War.

The SNS and Lega Nord are in discussions with Marine Le Pen's Front National (FN) in France and Geert Wilders' Freedom Party in the Netherlands over a new far-right bloc after the elections.

The UKIP has been deliberately promoted by the media and sections of the ruling elite that regard the EU as a constraint on the pursuit of its national interests. It is a rabid defender of the capitalist free market, calling for cuts to corporation tax, the abolition of inheritance tax, and the introduction of a flat-rate income tax. It has also called for an additional £77 billion in cuts in public spending on top of those already imposed by the coalition government.

It makes such demands while attempting to exploit concern about worsening social conditions. Its manifesto for the European and local council elections points to cuts in social provision, rising youth unemployment and stagnant wages. Recent surveys of UKIP supporters show anxiety about the widening gulf in pay: with 87 percent saying the pay gap in Britain is unfair.

That the UKIP can posture as anti-establishment is to a great extent because of the rightward shift of the Labour Party and trade unions, which are completely indifferent to the social conditions facing millions of workers and youth.

While Labour makes mild criticisms of the UKIP's posters, the party has repeatedly sought to outdo Conservative pledges to clamp down on immigration. Labour leader Ed Miliband has accused the coalition government of being "half-baked" on the issue.

It was former prime minister Gordon Brown who took up the slogan of the BNP, and now the UKIP, with his pledge in 2009 to create "British jobs for British workers".

Brown was building on the campaign by sections of the union bureaucracy and its pseudo-left footmen who have mounted campaigns ostensibly in defence of jobs that have as their real goal a defence of British companies.

The No2EU campaign, for example, was set up by the

Stalinist Communist Party and the recently deceased "left" transport union leader Bob Crow, with the backing of the Socialist Party (formerly Militant tendency).

No2EU advanced a "Britons First" policy, which it claimed was "not against foreign workers or xenophobic" but "simply defend[ed] the fundamental right to work under [national] union agreements." This resulted in a campaign for contracts to British firms.

No2EU speaks of the "social dumping of exploited foreign workers in Britain." There is little space between this and the claim by anti-immigration think tank MigrationWatch that "the sudden arrival of a very large number of very capable workers willing to work for low pay has had a negative impact on the employment of British-born workers at the bottom of the pay scale," or Farage's remark that "I don't blame people from poor countries for coming here, but I think it is the job of a British government to put the interests of our own people first."

Workers must reject the lies on which such noxious claims are based: that opposition to the pro-business EU means a defence of the pro-business nation state, or that opposition to national pro-business racism means support for the EU's undemocratic institutions.

There is justifiable anger across Europe and beyond at the misery created by austerity measures imposed by these institutions. The only progressive basis for organising this anger is through the international unity of the working class in the fight for the abolition of the EU, the creation of workers' governments across the region and the establishment of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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