

Class issues behind Sun columnist Katie Hopkins' attacks on migrants

David O'Sullivan
1 May 2015

The following is a statement by David O'Sullivan, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for Holborn and St. Pancras.

Katie Hopkins, a columnist for the *Sun*, has used the deaths of hundreds of migrants in the Mediterranean to spew out a stream of invective that can only be described as fascistic.

In April, at least five boats carrying almost 2,000 migrants to Europe sank in the Mediterranean Sea. More than 1,500 people are estimated to have perished. During this same period, more than 10,000 people were rescued, having almost suffered the same fate.

The first sinking on April 13 claimed 400 lives. On April 16, just prior to Hopkins' initial utterances, more than 40 people drowned after another migrant boat sank between Libya and Italy.

In her April 17 column, Hopkins wrote, "migrants are like cockroaches" and "are built to survive a nuclear bomb." Her comment stated, "NO, I don't care. Show me pictures of coffins, show me bodies floating in water, play violins and show me skinny people looking sad. I still don't care." She proposed the authorities "get Australian," adding, "Their approach to migrant boats is the sort of approach we need in the Med. They threaten them with violence until they bugger off."

"We don't need another rescue project. ... What we need are gunships sending these boats back to their own country," she wrote, likening migrants to a "plague of feral humans" and "vagrants." Some British towns were "festered sores, plagued by swarms of migrants and asylum seekers," she wrote.

Hopkins' filthy screed sparked widespread hostility and anger. An online petition calling for her sacking gained 300,000 signatures.

On April 19, just two days after her column was published, a boat overcrowded with migrants seeking

refuge in Europe capsized in the Mediterranean causing mass fatalities. More than 800 migrants, including scores of women and children, lost their lives.

The same day Hopkins was invited to host her first radio talk show on the privately owned London-based LBC (London's Biggest Conversation). LBC regularly includes guests such as Tory London Mayor Boris Johnson and Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. Hopkins continued her diatribe, telling listeners that the flow of migrants could be ended "by making a huge bonfire of all the boats in north Africa."

Her column provoked the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, to issue a statement demanding the "UK authorities, media and regulatory bodies take steps to curb incitement to hatred by British tabloid newspapers, in line with the country's obligations under national and international law."

Al Hussein said the "nasty underbelly of racism" was "characterising the migration debate in an increasing number of EU countries." It was "deeply shameful to see these types of tactics being used in a variety of countries, simply because racism and xenophobia are so easy to arouse in order to win votes or sell newspapers."

The chair of the Society of Black Lawyers (SBL) submitted a complaint to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe.

The SBL letter calls for Hopkins to be prosecuted as an individual, but there are broader issues involved. Her comments are not simply the ravings of an individual. The publications of such positions had to have been authorised at the highest level.

The *Sun* is owned by the billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch and her column is a deliberate floating of positions akin to those of the Nazis. Hopkins'

comments could have come from propagandist Joseph Goebbels, who constantly compared the Jews to cockroaches, lice and rats. Such statements were a staple of the Nazi weekly *Der Stürmer* (*The Attacker*).

This is just one of the interventions of the Murdoch press in the run up to the May 7 election.

Murdoch is personally supportive of the Conservative Party but has complained that if they cannot defeat the Labour Party, it would mean the “chop” for Tory Prime Minister David Cameron. In 2013 Murdoch met with Nigel Farage, the leader of the xenophobic UK Independence Party (UKIP), in an effort to shift the political climate even further to the right. Through Hopkins, he is now signalling that, with even more devastating attacks on the living standards of workers and young people to come after the election, efforts to scapegoat immigrants will be stepped up dramatically.

For the ruling elite, whipping up racism and blaming immigrants for the social problems created by capitalism is a time-worn strategy: This is why, in the final analysis, Murdoch is only putting forward a cruder version of what all major parties already support, to a lesser or greater extent.

Of course, no steps will be taken to curb Murdoch, as is clearly evidenced by the fact that neither he nor any leading figures within his News International (now renamed as News UK) were found guilty of any of the heinous crimes uncovered during the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal.

However, the *Sun* completely misjudged the public mood. Millions were horrified by the brutal deaths of refugees desperately fleeing war zones, as the number of people who signed the petition denouncing Hopkins testifies.

In contrast, politicians in London, Paris and Berlin shed a few crocodile tears even as the heads of the European Union (EU) moved to ensure that the borders of “Fortress Europe” are more secure still. Last week, a meeting of EU heads of state and government, including Prime Minister David Cameron, agreed to put more resources into operations Triton and Poseidon—expanding them into veritable war operations in the Mediterranean directed against refugees. A battle fleet is being tasked to “capture and destroy vessels” bringing migrants to Europe.

This all met with Hopkins’ approval, who wrote on April 24, “I am grateful to *The Sun* for letting me speak

my mind... I am also reassured the EU action plan for this crisis reflects my own views. Stop the traffickers and burn their boats.”

A warning must be sounded.

The Hopkins episode demonstrates that the most right-wing forces are being deliberately mobilised, to be used against the working class and the mass opposition that will develop to the even deeper austerity agenda that all parties are committed to imposing.

As we state in our manifesto, “Just like the whipping up of anti-Semitism in Germany in the 1930s, the promotion of UKIP and anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim propaganda is a sign that the ruling elite is seeking to build up fascist-type organisations, similar to the National Front in France and Golden Dawn in Greece.”

The elemental opposition and anger with which millions of people respond to the barbaric deaths of the migrants must be mobilised in a conscious struggle against capitalism.

The Socialist Equality Party, along with our sisters parties in Europe and internationally rejects all forms of nationalism and racism. We fight to unite working people internationally based on their common class interests, for a workers’ government pledged to socialist policies. For the overthrow of the European Union and the formation of United Socialist States of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.

I would urge all those who agree with these sentiments to attend the International Online May Day Rally on May 3. We urge those in London and Glasgow to come to our eve-of-poll meetings that will feature a live streaming of the rally.

For further information visit
www.socialequality.org.uk



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