

On banning the National Front

The Socialist Party of Great Britain is wholeheartedly in favour of the fullest freedom of speech. This is because we hold that out of full and free discussion of today's social problems only one valid conclusion can emerge: that Socialism alone will provide the framework within which they can be solved.

Full free speech means exactly what it says: any and every view should be allowed expression so that it can be examined and shown to be wrong. One of the more obnoxious views current these days is racialism, the idea that some human beings are inferior to others and ought to be treated as such.

Many well-meaning people, appalled at the growing support for the National Front and determined that a racialist party should never again be permitted to gain political power anywhere, have been prepared to listen sympathetically to those who call for the NF and its views to be banned. This is an understandable gut reaction but a little dispassionate reflection will show it to be wrong.

Would banning the NF lead to a diminution in racialist sentiments and ideas? Indeed, have the various Race Relations Acts banning the expression of racialist ideas in their cruder forms led to this? The anti-racialist legislation on the statute book has only led to racialists being more careful about the words they use. Ideas cannot be suppressed by legislation.

The real problem is why do certain sections of the working class hold racialist views and how can they be got to abandon them. It is fairly clear why certain workers entertain anti-black prejudices. Suffering from bad housing, poor hospital services, poor schools, etc., and having seen an immigration of black people into their areas they *mistakenly* link the two together to conclude that it is the coming of black immigrants that is the cause of their problems.

The various racialist Immigration Acts which have been passed by both Conservative and Labour governments to keep black people out have done much to give respectability to the view that immigration rather than capitalism is the cause of today's social problems.

So workers with racialist ideas are workers who, in their search for an explanation of and solution to their problems, have reached a mistaken conclusion. How can they be convinced that they are wrong? If they can't be convinced by legislation they can be convinced even less by the tactic of the Socialist Workers Party and others of insulting and even physically assaulting them. The only way is to try to demonstrate to them that their conclusions are wrong.

This is the approach the Socialist Party has always adopted and why, rather than physically fighting with the British Union of Fascists, the Union Movement or the NF, we have exposed their dangerous racialist nonsense before an audience of interested workers.

People who deny the validity of our tactic of combating racialism in calm, open argument are in effect denying that workers are capable of being convinced rationally

of the error of racialism. Many of these people have been influenced by Lenin and his contemptuous claim that left to themselves the working class is capable of evolving only a trade union consciousness. They believe that the working class is only fit to be led, in one direction or another, by some minority or other, and so need protection from those who like the NF seek to "mislead" them.

The ultimate basis of all arguments for censorship (and the call for the NF to be prevented from expressing its views *is* a call for censorship) is such an assumption that people are too stupid or irresponsible or immature to make up their own minds and that some superior body must therefore decide for them. For the SWP and others this superior body is themselves—the self-appointed vanguard of the working class. If they ever came to power the application of this claim to decide what the working class shall and shall not hear would mean the end of free speech for workers just as it did in Lenin and Trotsky's Russia.

Mere anti-racialist propaganda on its own, unlinked to propaganda for socialism, can't be effective. It offers no solution to the problems and frustrations which drive some workers to embrace racialism. It leaves unchallenged the cause (capitalism) while trying to deal with the effect (racialism).

The only effective way to combat racialism, then, is to propagate socialism.

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