

SUTR Briefing for the TUC meeting on 13th March 2023



Introduction

The racist riot in Knowsley, Merseyside and other anti-refugee mobilisations have shown where the government's scapegoating of refugees leads. The fascists have adopted Home Secretary Suella Braverman's "invasion of the Southern coast" inflammatory rhetoric as a slogan on which to mobilise.

The most recent and damaging intervention by the government is last week's announcement of the so-called "Illegal Migration Bill", the second reading of which will take place today. A central plank of the bill is that it ends the passage of small boats carrying refugees across the Channel, saying all adults will be detained for 28 days and asylum claims will be deemed "inadmissible" whatever the individual's circumstances. They will be removed either to their own country or a "safe third country", such as Rwanda, if that is not possible. Recent reports suggest that this will also apply to children accompanied by adults.

The UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and others say the bill amounts to an effective ban on the right to asylum. Some have argued that the bill deliberately breaches international law and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) so that the government will get embroiled in a row with the ECHR and can engage in a so-called "war on woke" ahead of this year's local elections and the next general election.

The bill is so controversial it led to a furious row between the Gary Lineker and the BBC. All usual football programmes were abandoned on the weekend of 11th-12th March, after all former footballers and

pundits walked out in solidarity with Lineker after he was suspended from Match of the Day. Wrong-footed by the scale of support for Gary Lineker both by the public and fellow co-workers, the BBC was forced to climb down issuing an apology for its handling of the row.

Like the Black Lives Matter movement and the support for England footballers taking the knee, the strength of support for refugees and defence of Gary Lineker illustrate that anti-racists are the majority. The anti-racist and anti-fascist movement must mobilise this majority and make its voice heard.

All this is taking place in the context of the government's failures in response to the cost of living crisis, which is decimating the living standards of the 99 per cent while the 1 per cent rake in profits to the tune of billions. This week is also a major week of strike action, with junior doctors striking today and several unions engaging in strike action and in the parents, patients, doctors, teachers rally standing up for our services on Budget Day on 15 March.

The fact that the government is prepared to give France £479 million to stop refugees from crossing the Channel tells you everything you need to know about racism and the cost of living crisis.

The government is using racism to scapegoat and distract from this crisis. This scapegoating of refugees is opening the door to the far right. We are seeing an explosion of racist and fascist demonstrations targeting refugees across Britain. In addition Britain First has announced it will be standing candidates in Dartford, Kent and Salford, Greater Manchester. Stand up to Racism (SUTR) has been responding to this

and mobilised against recent far right and fascist demonstrations, and mobilised the vote against fascists electorally.

Mobilising against fascists and racists

Mobilising against far right and fascist demonstrations is crucial for showing the breadth of opposition to such groups, demoralising and preventing them from growing and challenging their racist and bigoted arguments.

Most of the recent far right mobilisations have been called by the fascist Patriotic Alternative. The demonstrations against Drag Queen Storytelling in South London have been called by the far right Turning Point.

SUTR has mobilised opposition to these demonstrations. SUTR seeks to build the broadest possible alliance for maximum unity and support in local areas. We challenge racist arguments used by fascists and ensure there is a strong "Refugees Welcome" message.

Knowsley & Merseyside

SUTR ensured our activists were in Knowsley on 10th February, showing support for asylum seekers and opposing attempts to divide our communities.

In response to the Knowsley riot we mobilised for the "Merseyside Anti-Racists Unite:



refugees welcome" rally with Liverpool TUC, FBU Merseyside, PCS DWP Liverpool and local anti-racists on 18th February. Around 1,000 people joined this event called in response to events in Knowsley the previous week.

Others have also mobilised against the far right in Knowsley and Merseyside.

Erskine, Scotland

Demonstrations outside the Muthu River hotel housing asylum seekers in Erskine took place on 5th February and 12th March. Amongst others SUTR mobilised against these demonstrations and were supported by Unite Community, PCS and others. Around 80 people joined the anti-racist/anti-fascist demonstration and 50 were on the fascist mobilisation.



Rotherham, Yorkshire

SUTR organised a very successful local mobilisation attended by around 500 people, including local trade unions and anti-racists, on 18th February. Only around 40 people were on the fascist demonstration attended by Patriotic Alternative and former English Defence League. After all the attempts to use the issue of sexual abuse and exploitation to sow division and stir up racism and Islamophobia, this was a defeat for the fascists.

Oxford

A large far right demonstration took place in Oxford on 18th February. Fascists were

at the core of this but they had successfully managed to pitch the demonstration as a genuine protest against traffic management plans. Therefore the event attracted wider layers of people from the local community and up to 2,000 attended the demonstration.

The cutting edge of this demonstration was climate change conspiracy theories against traffic management plans designed to stem the flow of traffic and car use to reduce emissions, and take advantage of some of the problems that have arisen as a result.

SUTR mobilised around 200 people against this. Such far right mobilisations illustrate the importance of uniting broad opposition to the far right.

South East London

On 25th February SUTR led a successful mobilisation in Honor Oak, Lewisham, against far right opposition to Drag Queen storytelling. Around 1,000 local anti-racists, trade unionists and trans activists joined the demonstration. Another example of the importance uniting the broadest possible alliance against the far right and fascism.

On the other hand, around 40 people joined the far right demonstration led by Turning Point. Around half of this demonstration was made up of local fascists.

Another demonstration led by Turning Point took place on 10th March in Dulwich. SUTR organised a counter demonstration that received positive press coverage from BBC London, with around 400 people attending. Only 20 joined the Turning Point demo.

A further Turning Point demonstration is planned again in Honor Oak Park on 25th March and SUTR has organised a counter-demonstration.

Nottingham

SUTR led a successful local and regional mobilisation against Patriotic Alternative in Nottingham on Saturday 25th February. Around 250 people joined the counter-



demonstration; meanwhile only 60 people were on the fascist demonstration.

Newquay, Cornwall

SUTR mobilised for the demonstration against Patriotic Alternative in Newquay on 25th February. The event was organised by the People's Assembly, SUTR and others and was attended by around 250 people. A similar number joined the fascist demonstration organised by Patriotic Alternative.

Skegness, Lincolnshire

Up to 300 fascists mobilised for the Patriotic Alternative demonstration in Skegness on 25th February. They were bussed in from outside the area and none lived locally.

SUTR tried to work with local communities to organise a local opposition. Due to the number of demonstrations taking place on the same day in London, Newquay and Nottingham, we were unable to pull off a mobilisation in Skegness.

Dover

On Saturday 4th March SUTR organised a demonstration in Dover, in response to another Patriotic Alternative demonstration. The PA tried to use an allegation of sexual assault/harassment against a young asylum seeker in school by a young woman student. The incident was reported to the police who investigated the issue and took no further action.

Fascists tried to racialise and seize on the

issue to build support. In the end they only manage to mobilise around 100 people. A similar number joined the counter demonstration. Given the amount of negative coverage regarding refugees arriving in Dover, the fascist demonstration was perceived as small and a defeat for them.



Cannock, West Midlands

SUTR organised a local and regional response to the Patriotic Alternative in Cannock on Saturday 11th March. Around 200 joined our demonstration and up to 300 joined the fascist demonstration.



Salford, Greater Manchester

On 11th March Manchester SUTR organised a day of action, including leafleting against Britain First, which is standing a candidate in the Walkden ward in Salford in this year's local elections.



Supporting strike action

SUTR has actively mobilised for and supported all strike actions. Our anti-racist "refugees welcome" intervention at these events has been very well received. We also supported the NHS demonstration on Saturday 11th March.

UN Anti-Racism Day, Saturday 18th March

As with previous years, this year's UN Anti-Racism Day demonstration, backed by the TUC and affiliated unions, will be an important opportunity to demonstrate the strength and breadth of support for refugees, oppose the government's new asylum bill, and oppose antisemitism, Islamophobia, sinophobia anti-ESEA and anti-GRT racism.

The events in London, Glasgow and Cardiff are part of the "World Against Racism" international day of action.