Race Today

VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1984 70p

EDWIN MADUNAGU



Reports from Jamaica & Nigeria

The Grenada Debate

Black Representation in Parliament & the Labour Party

CBS/B/986

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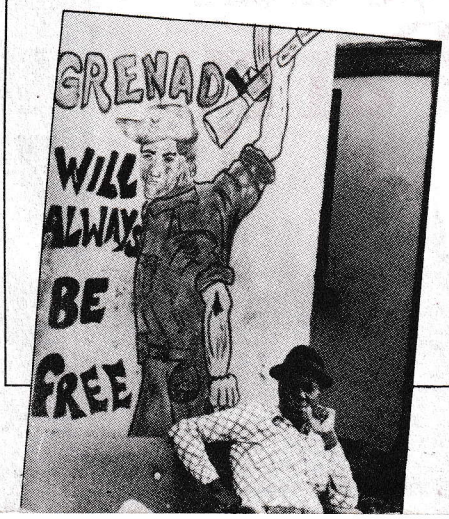


Letters

NO CREDIT

Dear Editor,
I note that you used one of my photographs of Baraka in the current issue but did not give me a credit. With respect, I think that this omission reflects badly on the magazine. Even if photographers – or whoever – support the objectives of a political publication, it is only fair that our work be recognised with a by-line in the same way as a writer's contribution is generally credited. It helps the ego in trying times, and sometimes makes up for the fact that we supply such work on a complimentary basis when we pick up a sale through this means of advertising.

So, hope you will change your practice in future.

Val Wilmer
London N16

THE MINERS STRIKE

Dear Editor,
It is good to see in *Race Today* (Jul/Aug '84), 'The Voice of the Black Community in Britain', a whole page given to the understanding of the Miners' struggle. The article also mentioned 15 womens/wives support group for the miners. Are there any Black Women miners? What contribution have the miners given to the womens struggle, and the anti-racist struggle? It is too much to ask that solidarity operate both ways?

Yours in bleak – black and white Womanhood,

Jahanara & Clara
London NW6

Ed. Note
The Grunwick strike, involving mainly Asian women strikers, received mass support from the miners on the picket lines of the strike. Indeed, a member of the Race Today Collective found himself in a cell with several miners following clashes between police and pickets. If my memory serves me right I believe Arthur Scargill was arrested too. Cheer up Jahanara & Clara! Life ain't that bleak!

JOURNALISTS FREED

Dear Editor,
V.C. Nchami, Bonu Machungong, Charles Ndi-Chia, S. Magwa Tebid and Peter Adi Fonte, journalists and staff of the *Cameroon Times*, wish me to extend their thanks to all those who helped me call for their release from prison in Cameroon earlier this year.

They were very encouraged by the support they received and are continuing to publish their paper.

Diana Davies
Deptford
London SE8

INFORMATION SERVICE

Dear Editor,
We are from an organisation called Ekomedia, which is an alternative communications and media network/news agency with groups in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, West Germany, Ireland and here in London. Our aim is to provide an alternative to the information monopolies e.g. Reuter, UPI, and to serve as a media facility for groups who are actively fighting the destruction of the planet, the growing police state, patriarchy, the multinationals, the exploitation of the Third World, militarism. . . the list is endless! We would like to hear from groups about what they are involved in on a regular basis in order that we can distribute this in our network abroad and here in Britain.

Ekomedia
Brailsford Road
London SW2

BLACK ARTISTS SEMINAR

Dear Editor,
I felt the object of the meeting was supposed to have paved the way forward for black artists, but I, and from what I gather also from other artists, was left with a feeling of ambivalence. Instead of eliminating a feeling of isolation, which was successfully achieved in the physical sense through your Second Open Exhibition 'Creation for Liberation', I felt that emotionally, this mission was not so successful. I felt that I started questioning my potential and worth as a black artist because I felt that what I was painting was not a 'positive' contribution to society for the reasons Errol stated. 'Black Art' I found, was still not defined, even at the time I left which was at 10.30pm and I did try in a somewhat garbled form to relay a suggestion but was overpowered by a more dominant force, so the power is in the pen (or should I say typewriter) this time.

I feel that if we, the Black Artists are *directed* on a theme to follow, a theme (on the lines talked about during the Seminar based on Events, situations of Black People) and asked to interpret a suggestion put forward by him, or a panel, in our own version, in whatever medium, method or inspiration we felt fit, the artist would then have submitted a conducive piece of work relevant to 'Black Art'; you in turn could have the third exhibition based on 'Black Art' as opposed to work done by 'Black Artists'.

I feel that because most of us were born in England, or have spent considerable amount of years in this country, we have become somewhat subconsciously passive in our interpretations and contributions to society. I feel that this task would have to be a conscious effort, and I feel that being 'commissioned', so to speak, to paint a particular person, event or situation by yourgoodselves, would in turn give us a challenge, enhance our feeling of self-worth and ultimately pave the way forward for black artists as well as being a vast contribution to society.

I would like to close by saying that 'art' should not be dissected and categorised, but appreciated for its worth, which is what it is, a human skill. I feel that any deviation from the human skill is based on the development of the human mind, so what is here today, although is gone tomorrow does not eliminate the fact that for a time it existed, we exist and strive relentlessly to be free.

Myrna-Loy
St Raphaels Way
London NW10

STOP THE HARASSMENT OF ACE KELLY

Dear Race Today,
Once again Ace Kelly, Chairman of the Stoke Newington Defence Campaign, has been the victim of police harassment.

On June 10 1984, while waiting for a bus with his six year old daughter Simone he was arrested for kidnapping and Grevious Bodily Harm.

The police claim that on June 8 he forced his way into Simone's mother's flat slashing up a 2 year old and running off with the 3 year old. Despite his protestation he and his daughter were bundled off to the police station. Some hours later they were both released, his daughter suffering from shock after her terrifying ordeal. He was charged not with kidnapping and GBH but with obstructing the police. The police claim it was a case of mistaken identity. Now two months later he is further charged with breach of the peace and 2 counts of assault on police officers.

In the last 18 months Ace has been arrested 7 times.

Stoke Newington & Hackney Defence Committee,
380 Old Street, London EC1
Tel: 01-739 8547

EDWIN MADUNAGU

Editorial

Black Representation in the Labour Party

The Labour Party goes to Conference in October with much on its plate and little appetite for the tasks at hand. The leadership, whose major reason for existing is the political defeat of the Thatcher government, can hardly be said to be in the vanguard of that struggle.

The party has been completely displaced by the National Union of Mineworkers and its leadership overtaken by Arthur Scargill. It is commonplace that those of us who are either actively or otherwise hostile to the Thatcher government look to the miners and their leadership as the major force which could, at a minimum, achieve the demoralisation of the Conservative government. It is ironic that Kinnock et al. will only retain some semblance of authenticity in the current political struggle if the miners are defeated.

Another time bomb ticks slowly but surely beneath the seats of the Labour Party leadership. Among the resolutions which will be before the conference, thirteen of those demand an amendment to the Party's Constitution. The amendment calls for the legitimisation of black sections in the party. Like the Trades Unions and women, blacks are demanding representation as blacks in the highest echelons of the party.

This is a new development and can be understood only in the context of the tremendous social explosions in the UK involving blacks in the last three years or so.

There was the mass demonstration on the New Cross issue followed by the uprising against the police in 1981. Much more lies beneath the surface, which can come to the fore with great force and power at anytime. It is on the strength of this movement that those blacks in the Labour party are making their bid for power. The strength of the movement only explains why the blacks in the Labour Party have chosen to move at this time. It does not explain their particular reasons for their dissatisfaction.

Here goes. Blacks participate in almost every area of national life. We fight and die as members of the armed forces in the Falklands and Ireland; we produce and consume the commodities in several of the major industries in the country; we are active in most if not all the service industries in the urban centres; we are well represented in the professions. Yet, there is not a single black Member of Parliament out of 625 constituencies. Not one.

And the struggle has broken out in the Labour Party and not the Conservative Party, the Liberal or SDP because it is the Labour Party which blacks have always supported and continue to support.

It is a shame and a burning shame that after twenty-five years the Labour Party has not been able to find a single safe seat for one of its many black aspirants. We in Race Today are very reluctant to accuse others of racism, but when blacks in the Labour Party throw such an accusation at the party leadership we say that their case is strong, very strong indeed and consequently they have every right in the world to organise themselves to put that matter right.

Having said that, we now turn to the black organisation within the party. Whether they win the demand for a section is not too important; the fact is they are organised. This begs the question organised around what and for what?

Merely to get a black person in Parliament? Such vulgar careerism will win little support among blacks who have already experienced in the colonies middle class elements who have leapt to power and glory on their backs, only to turn savagely on those who they claim to represent initially.

The alternative to careerism is a political approach and orientation in several areas of national policy. To date not a single word has been spoken or written by the black sections in this regard.

How is the issue of mass structural unemployment to be resolved. Are we to demand jobs when technology is systematically displacing manpower, or are we to demand a shorter working week, a shorter working life and more leisure.

How is the Irish question to be resolved or is it that the Irish question is not the business of blacks?

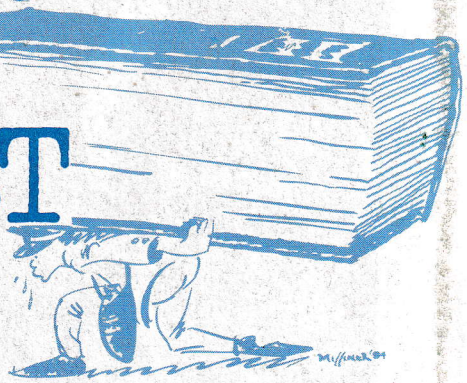
Is the American military to be stationed in Europe forever either, with or without nuclear weapons?

Do Third World countries need the knowledge and discoveries of western civilisation? If they do, is this to be transferred by aid in its current form? If not then how? These are some of the questions of our age and of the moment and pressing questions they are.

Unless the black groups in the party speak to these they are clearly bound to be trapped within a series of racial squabbles and recriminations which take the rank and file in the black community and the population in the UK nowhere.

Race Today September/October 1984

BOOKS by POST



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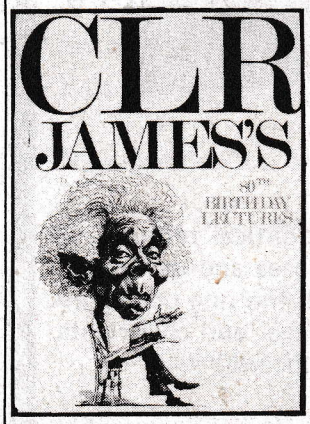
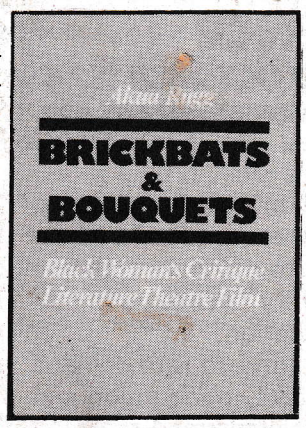


CLR JAMES, the renowned Marxist historian, political theorist, literary critic and cricket writer has produced yet another illuminating publication.

The lectures were organised by the Race Today Collective, but the choice of topics was CLR James's: Socialism or Barbarism; England and America: Two English Speaking Democracies; and Immigrants to Britain: Formerly Colonial Peoples. Darcus Howe, Editor of Race Today, chaired the series.
Price: £2.50 (p&p 45p)



BRICKBATS AND BOUQUETS by AKUA RUGG . . . covers a fairly representative cross section of literature, film and theatre by and about blacks. This endeavour carves out for her, perhaps, the position of being the only consistent critic in this field.
Price: £2.75 (p&p 45p)

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