

REPORT OF DISCUSSIONS AT THE RIC-EDINBURGH ZOOM MEETING ON BLACK LIVES MATTER, 29.7.20

Speaker – Benitha Iradakunda

Facilitator:- Stephen McMurray

The following contributions were made either verbally or in the Chatbox.

G.K. thanked Benitha. Her contribution provided both an inspiration and a challenge to those who have been around for some time.

A *Guardian* analysis has found at least 260 towns and cities held Black Lives Matter protests in June and early July, from the Forest of Dean to Shetland.

“Nothing like this has ever happened in my lifetime. When we protest in Northampton, we’re lucky to get 10 people to turn up and we had 1,000 people attend the first Black Lives Matter protest,” said Tre Ventour, 24, a writer and race equality activist.

Hakim Adi, the first person of African heritage to become a professor of history in Britain, described the Black Lives Matter demonstrations as “unprecedented” and the largest anti-racism protests in the UK since the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

At the heart of these rallies is a new generation of young Britons who are declaring in their thousands that black lives – their lives – matter.”

G.M. who had also worked in Uganda, outlined the work being done by Pilton Against Racism. One of the problems was that some of those influenced by racist ideas had no knowledge of the people from the ethnic minorities living in their communities. It was still possible to win over some of these people away from the hard core racists.

BLM also has considerable significance for the independence movement. One of the organisers of All Under One Banner had said that he hoped to get BLM support in future activities, and that AUOB should support BLM activities, and that AUOB should support BLM activities.

G.K. suggested that the next big pro Indie demonstration could invite BLM to lead the demonstration. ‘Another Anti-Racist Scotland is Possible...’

P.C. Brilliant idea - we should campaign for that.

N.G. Yes - excellent idea!

W.B. emphasised how important work was in the community. This had been his experience in Pilton and Muirhouse for many years. Before Covid-19 a meeting had also been organised in Craigmillar to challenge racist attacks on a local Asian shopkeeper. This had led to the formation of a new organisation CanDo. However, it was important that this was extended to Bonnyrigg, where campaigner Debora Kayembe has been subjected to racist attacks. These continued after she had been despite being moved to another house by Midlothian council.

H.H. said Debora is starting a campaign to defend her based in the community. It will be called Debora's Friends and will be on social media - would be good to get involved with this.

P.C. said we should do more but one thing we should do from this meeting is send a message of solidarity to Debora from Edinburgh RIC.

This was agreed.

M.D. said that he worked in mental health and Covid-19 had both accentuated the problems many faced in the community, but also led to greater participation in the local Covid-19 groups that had sprung up. He wondered if BAME groups had similar experiences.

Benitha said that she agreed that others, such as those facing mental health problems needed recognition. However, a big problem for the black African and Caribbean community, compared even to the Asian community, was the lack of public representation

G.K. backing Benitha, said that ten years ago just one in 40 MPs was non-white, according to research by the independent think tank British Future.

There are 13 more non-white MPs than in the last Parliament, but all represent English seats. There are no black, Asian and minority ethnic MPs in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

I found these stats for Scottish Parliament: In five Holyrood elections since 1999, each electing 129 MSPs, Holyrood has had a total of four members from BAME communities - all of them men of Scots-Pakistani heritage.

One of the four - Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf - said that a record of "no black MSP ever, no female BAME MSP ever" was "frankly a failure of all of us, regardless of party".

L.H. had been working with Unite Against Fascism, which had largely been led by white socialists. It was good to see a black led BLM. He hoped that there could be greater coordination between these two organisations.

R.M. thanked Benitha. He had been active in the anti-fascist movement for many years, but had thought that the sort of everyday racist abuse, which Benitha described in Scotland, had been confined to the margins since the 1970s and 80s. This was a reflection of the work which still needs to be done.

However, he was encouraged by the impact of BLM. there was now even support amongst Rangers supporters. Given that this has long been a stronghold of neo-fascists this was really significant. It provided the opportunity to place a wedge between the neo-fascists and the majority of Rangers supporters.

L.C. said, good points, R.M.

G.K. agreed.

A.A. said he thought that BLM was the most significant movement since he first became politically involved in 1968. Back then it was the opposition to the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement which inspired millions throughout the world. Today, fortunately Trump hasn't started a war with China, but BLM has provided the worldwide inspirational equivalent to the CRM. As someone who was an active trade unionist for all of his working life, he took inspiration from the many thousands of young people, not in trade unions and trapped in precarious jobs, who had been inspired by BLM and were the biggest presence on the Edinburgh demo and elsewhere on June 7th. Politically this is more significant than either the now marginalised the Corbyn or Sanders campaigns, which have been tied to the Labour and Democrat parties. He thought that thus hopefully pointed the way to new wider political organisation based on the exploited and oppressed.

L.C. said me too, A.A.

Benitha said that her mother had made a similar connection to the world political significance of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and BLM.

M.M. although having now lived in Scotland for many years, is originally from the USA. Racism was more subtle but nevertheless real in Scotland. Benitha

outlining her experiences showed just how prevalent racism still is in Scotland. BLM has now brought this to our attention.

L.C. said this was an important point.

D.S. thanked RIC for convening this session. It's so important we start really educating ourselves - about the systemic racism in Scotland and how this demeans people of colour and the white people who have "enjoyed" the benefit of a white supremacy society.

He also pointed to the connection between Climate Change and its disproportionate effect on black communities across the world. [An online meeting was being organised in 8th September.](#)

A.A. invited participants to join Edinburgh RIC and P.C. provided the following links:- _

www.edinburghric.org

and

edinburghric@gmail.com

Stephen thanked Benitha and the participants for a very good meeting.

Benitha Thanked to everyone for having her today