



NewsWire

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Special Issue on Traveller Rights – April 2005 – National Demonstration

Sun Starts Hate Campaign Against Travellers

By barn | 14.03.2005 14:22

The Sun started a campaign on Wednesday the 9th of March to "stop (the) Gypsy invasion". One front page was followed by another, which claimed mass popular support for their racist ramblings. By the second day the Daily Mail had caught up on this incursion onto their own home ground and come out with their own headline.

The Sun's first article was headlined "stamp on the camps". Had this been any other minority group, would they have got away with it? The Sun is calling for a repeal of the Human Rights Act so that Gypsies and Travellers won't have the right to a home, but they claim this is not racism because they are highlighting 'good' Gypsies who apparently agree with them and live in a way they find acceptable. The Sun claims that Gypsies and Travellers deliberately flout planning regulations and get a special deal due to the Human Rights Act, which makes them "untouchable".

However, the reality is far removed from the Sun's version of the truth. For non-Travellers planning permission applications have a 12% chance of failure. For Travellers the figure is 90%. Therefore the community has no choice but to apply for permission retroactively, after they move on the land. At least then they have a few years to go through the appeal process (which they pay for). In case you are wondering why they don't live a travelling life, on the whole this has been made impossible due to the Criminal Justice Bill 1994. There is no where to stop anymore, and when they do stop they can be moved on immediately by police and bailiffs. Twenty years ago the government directed Travellers to buy their own land, after removing the responsibility of councils to provide sites. Now site after site is evicted, traumatically, violently, because of the impossibility of obtaining planning permission.

This is racism. Gypsies and Travellers are still the least literate, have the lowest mortality rates of any other group in Britain. Police regularly make brutal attacks on families and communities. Gypsy children are still beaten to death in racist attacks. Having headlines in some of the widest read papers in this county calling for attacks on the Traveller community

is bound to be popular because they are the only people in Britain that it is still acceptable to be openly racist to. These articles will make a bad situation worse. For Gypsies and Travellers, to see these articles in the papers is a manifestation of the hostility they experience anyway, and they will stir up more hatred.



Photograph from Paine Lane evicted site (metrle)

Comments from readers:

- *"who are you (or the rest of your sun reading buddies) to tell other people how to live."* Just because the structure of our society doesn't support a certain way of life, we shouldn't be victimising the groups that choose to live their lives that way. Perhaps we should be questioning the rigid assumptions that create the idea of a 'normal' lifestyle. [...] I am shocked that in 2005 it is still acceptable to derogatorily generalise about travellers and to express such hatred towards a group of people simply because they are different.
- Dear Indy Media, reading your page on travellers, I feel that this country (UK) has slipped back into the mindset of the 1930s Germany that spawned National Socialism. I live in a little caravan and have a well paid job and pay taxes. My way of life is no-one else's business and I want to live in a democracy but not one like this. A slippery slope is the route we are on now, ending up with barb wire camps and ghettos to satisfy, thick as shit, right wing morons who could not even spell democracy. kind

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regards, *ChrisRR*

- It really makes no difference how we describe 'travellers', whether as 'saints' or 'sinners'. Either way the argument is built on a racist premise: that people should be evaluated on the basis of their ethnicity rather than as individual human beings. The same tactic can be used to produce hatred towards any group: simply focus on the crimes of Jewishish; Asian; Christian or African individuals, and hold these people up as representative of an entire group. Intellectually it's an equally meaningless exercise - like focusing on the behaviour of people with red hair or long toenails. People fall into the trap of defending or criticising the group concerned, without challenging the ridiculous, racist assumptions behind the argument. -- *Dr Strangelove*

Read more comments and have your say:

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/cambridge/2005/03/306570.html>

A report from the Cottenham traveler community

manos | 19.01.2005 01:13

A group of activist from the Cambridge Action Network alarmed by the overt racism of some local newspaper articles and websites, decided to visit the traveler community outside Cottenham, Cambridgeshire. Eleven settlements there are under the direct threat of eviction: people are going to be kicked off their land by bailiffs, driven to the county borders, and their homes will be trashed. Unless we do something to prevent it...

We arrived at Smithy Fen, five minutes outside Cottenham, just after dark. The road was not lit, and badly maintained. Although our visit was unannounced it was easy to be directed to Patrick's home, a local resident, that welcomed us into his caravan. There was a fair bit of distrust at the beginning; Patrick even asked us, only half joking, if we were associated with the BNP. 'You see they have been leafleting around the town to drive us out', he explains. Our explanations, that we would like to show

solidarity with the community under threat, and our common acquaintances appeared him, so the atmosphere became less tense.

His first question exposed us completely: 'Do you know anything about traveler issues?', obviously very little. So he gave us some background: in 1968 a law was passed that local councils have to provide land for traveler sites. Most of them did not. Those that did only provided for small settlements of 6-12 Caravans. Those who did not fit had to leave! In 1994 the Tory government decided that no more sites were to be build. Having to adjust with the new reality many travelers, bought land, brought electricity and water, and build sewage systems to serve their needs. Around 2002-3 a campaign was spearheaded by Terry Brownbill, to drive some of the people living in the Cottenham site out.

'But you see the story starts much earlier, in Germany. There was a man called Hitler' Patrick continues. 'He persecuted Jewish people and Gypsies. Jewish people have managed to be accepted in society, while we are still persecuted'. An exaggeration? Hardly! Reading Brownbill's website:

<http://www.middleenglandinrevolt.co.uk/> and substituting 'traveler' for 'Jew', exposes its true nature. Statements like "800 wealthy and aggressive travelers rode into town, set up a massive camp on Smithy Fen on the edge of the village and usurped Human Rights legislation to claim their right to stay.", or "50 communities across the country struggling to defend themselves against traveller invasions." are only few that show how easily travelers are defined as the 'others' and are given collective qualities, that calls for them being driven away. It seems, what is demanded is a kind of modern pogrom. Patrick continues, 'the claim that there are 800 people living in the 11 plots can only convince people that have never been here'. He challenges us to look around. It would indeed be difficult to fit 80 people in each plot of about 40ft by 90ft.

Patrick is quite passionate about uncovering the hypocrisy: 'People say that we have swarmed public services, schools and doctors, but there are only very few of us'. He contrast the small traveler community with the planned 29 600 new homes that are planned to be build in the nearby village of Oakington. He is cynical: 'Complaining about us gives local politicians easy votes, they are just out there to be elected they don't care', the populist and racist rhetoric clearly still works. Although the community has been the focus of attention of the media, he does not have much hope into them. 'What they wanted to know when they came to talk to me here was not our problems or opinions, but what is the cost of my TV.'

Court cases are due to be decided in the following months, and it is likely that some

members of the community will be under threat of eviction. What does this means? The police will close down all access to the site at 6am in the morning and a group of bailiffs will go in. They will escort the families to the county border. Their homes, or other structures on the grounds, will be demolished. Fair? Now close your eyes and imagine it is your family...

Protest at home of bailiff Bryan Constant

Tony Jackson | 08.03.2005 17:14

Around a dozen people protested outside the home of bailiff Bryan Constant, of Riseley, Bedfordshire on Sunday. Protestors rang bells, blew whistles & hit pots & pans.

Mr Constant runs Constant & Co, a Bedford - based company that specializes in evicting Travellers using violence, often from land that they have bought and occupied for years. In January Constant Baliffs jumped on a man at Twin Oaks, Borehamwood, cracking his ribs. Letters were delivered to Constant's neighbors, informing them of his activities, and posters were put up in the village, calling on Constant & Co to end their Brutal & Racist evictions. Mr Constant runs Constant & Co, a Bedford - based company that specializes in evicting Travellers using violence, often from land that they have bought and occupied for years. In January Constant Baliffs jumped on a man at Twin Oaks, Borehamwood, cracking his ribs. Letters were delivered to Constant's neighbors, informing them of his activities, and posters were put up in the village, calling on Constant



Travellers site near ski village evicted & Co to end their Brutal & Racist evictions.

📍 Travellers site near ski village evicted. The travellers site at the ski village in Sheffield was evicted some time ago. Here are a few pictures to show the empty space left. <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2005/02/304970.html>

📍 Evicted traveller site: Paines Lane. A group of activists from Cambridge and Ipswich has been visiting traveller communities in East Anglia. This included an evicted site, Paines Lane. The photos below show the extent of the destruction that the 'eviction' crew (bailiffs and Epping council) has caused. Also the access the the property was blocked by a large skip to prevent anyone comming back. Burned out trailers, dug up spaces, ripped fences, ... <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/cambridge/2005/03/306590.html>



Paines Lane evicted site: the entrance is blocked.

📍 Traveller Site Raided. More than 150 police from four different forces, a police helicopter and 35 vehicles were used to raid a Traveller site in York on Thursday. In the early morning all residents were removed from their homes and all dwellings were searched. <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/09/297933.html>

📍 The resistible rise of the Cottenham residents association The so called Cottenham residents association held a public meeting yesterday evening, 22 Feb 2005 in the local college hall. Despite what the name of the association would suggest its sole purpose is to handle a single 'issue' as they prefer to call it: the nearby traveler community of Smithy Fen... <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/cambridge/2005/02/305792.html>

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