

Far Right Groups

The world economic downturn is felt to have had a detrimental effect on minority groups. The co-ordinator of the European Roma Policy Coalition, for example, has observed European far right groups growing in strength, with attacks on Roma people in a number of countries. euobserver.com/851/27250

From time to time attempts are made to establish groups here that are antagonistic to the presence of minority-ethnic people. In January 2007 the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that the Knights of the Invisible Empire, a white supremacist group, was active in the Ballymena and Craigavon areas. The same article suggested that Combat 18, the White Nationalist Party and the National Front were associated with an increase in racist activities. In May 2009 posters appeared in the Co. Down town of Comber, saying 'Save our land. Join the Klan.' Fliers featuring images of the Battle of the Somme accompanied by swastikas had been distributed in the town previously. See www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sunday-life/news/evil-klan-hoods-in-ulster-net-hate-campaign-13902207.html and www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-telegraph/north-down/news/lsquomindless-idiotrsquo-behind-new-racial-slur-flyers-in-comber-14299561.html

There were complaints that loyalists distributed British National Party (BNP) leaflets in north Antrim around the time that foreign people were attacked. The BNP say that they distributed several thousand pieces of literature in Mid Ulster in February, 2009. Misunderstanding the role of the proposed Larne Immigration Detention Centre, the BNP worked on local fears and made alarmist and tasteless statements about Larne being 'earmarked as a dumping ground for illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers'. In November 2010 they registered formally to contest elections in Northern Ireland for the first time. *Searchlight* magazine puts their local membership at around 50 people. <http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=330>

In July 2009, the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Great Britain resolved 'that racism is a denial of the Gospel' and voted to prohibit members of the clergy from being members of the BNP. www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.newsDetail&newsid=364 As a result of concern following recent elections, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland held a conference on 5 October 2009 in London, 'Voting with Our Feet – The Churches' Engagement with Far Right Politics' and published 'Racial Justice & the Ballot Box: Exploring a Christian Response to Far-Right Political Parties', a paper to help Christians to articulate strong and informed responses. There was particular concern about 'the tactic of presenting a racist agenda as Christian'. This paper can be downloaded at www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf_view.php?id=92.