

SPEECH: ANTI-REFORM ELECTION CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

My name is Karen Arthur. I'm a grandmother, an artist, author, broadcaster and menopause campaigner. I'm an ex teacher of almost 3 decades in my mid-sixties and I did not expect to be standing here before you all today. I am here because we've reached a crisis and I cannot stay silent. I need to stand up and say something.

Both my parents came to the UK from Barbados in 1960. Posters saying 'No Irish, no Blacks, no dogs' were commonplace. My mother has many stories about being refused accommodation after being seen in person, and my late father's continuous rejection for gainful and much needed employment. We moved to a small conservative town in Oxfordshire in a handful of Black families amongst 30,000 inhabitants. My own experience of being called racist names on the way home from school or being bullied in class stays with me.

The 1960s and 70s, when I was growing up, was the time of Enoch Powell, the National Front on the streets, and later the British National Party or BNP.

They were not easy times to grow up Black in Britain. You felt the 'othering'. The unwelcome stares. You knew the danger. You knew who was organising against you.

I moved to Hastings after decades in Lewisham, London over three years ago. I love the celebration of our differences and the warm welcome I received. I was heartened by the support that refugees were being offered. Yet the recent Raising the flag - racism disguised as patriotism - campaign was the first time I felt unsafe in many years. I wasn't the only one experiencing this racist trauma.

It feels like we're going backwards.

So I'm standing here today, in my 60s, and I'll be honest, **this moment feels even more frightening**. Because today, it's not just fringe groups marching on the streets. **Today, the ideas of the far right are being pushed from the very top of society.**

They are being **funded, amplified and, crucially, normalised** by some of the most powerful people on earth – billionaires, media empires, politicians.

And what makes it worse, we don't just face the far right. We face a political establishment that is **echoing their arguments**.

We now have a Labour government that is yielding to the blatant lies that migrants are to blame for the crisis in housing, in the NHS and in our public services.

In the past, I voted for labour because my parents did at first and then because I felt they were a party that aligned with my values of equality for all. Yet I never thought I would see the day when a Labour Prime Minister would be **channelling the language of Enoch Powell**. Blaming people who look like me. Claiming that we have done 'incalculable damage' to this country. And ultimately paving the way for Reform UK to take hold.

Reform are talking about mass deportations on a scale Britain has never seen – 650,000 people. They want a British ICE, modelled on the US version – detention centres, raids, people taken from their homes. And within their ranks, there is growing support for what they call 'repatriation' or 'remigration.'

In the 1970s, the National Front used that term to mean deporting all Black and Asian people, even those born here.

A recent poll found that **54%** of Reform members believe that non-white British citizens born abroad should be forced or encouraged to leave the UK. And **20%** say even people whose parents were born here should be removed. Let that sink in.

That's not about immigration control. That's about who belongs. That's about saying Black and brown people, no matter how long we've been here, are not really British. It's our friends, our neighbours and our families.

With war escalating internationally, we all know what comes next. War means rising prices. Pressure on jobs. Cuts. And when those pressures hit, **they will try harder to divide us even more.**

They will say: "It's not us, it's them." We've seen where that road leads. Many of us know our history. We know what happens when minorities are blamed for crises they did not create.

We can already see the danger growing. Look at Stephen Yaxley-Lennon aka Tommy Robinson. On 13th September last year, he led the **biggest far-right mobilisation in British history.**

And now he's calling another one, on 16th May this year. The police have given him the whole of Trafalgar Square and Whitehall – on Nakba Day, the anniversary of the expulsion of the Palestinians from their land by European White Supremacists in 1948...

This is not something we can ignore. We have to say again, as our side did at Cable Street and in Lewisham – **they shall not pass.**

We know can do it. This time last week, just 7 days ago, on 28th March, Stand Up to Racism, through the Together alliance, helped organise the **biggest anti-racist, anti-far right mobilisation this country has ever seen.**

Hundreds of thousands of people, across all demographics, standing together.

This demonstration showed that **the far right** may be **loud, but we are many.** It showed everyone that most people in this country do not want hate. We believe in living together, side by side in fairness and in solidarity.

And we have seen what happens when people take a stand. For example, In Minneapolis, ordinary people came together to push back against immigration raids, to defend their neighbours, to say: **“You are not taking people from our communities.”**

That kind of courage matters. And we can do the same here. Because the truth is that every right we have has been won by people who stood up. People who refused to accept racism. People who refused to be divided. People who organised.

And that is what this meeting is about today. This is not just a warning. This is a call to action. Let’s stand together. Let’s organise. And let’s say, loud and clear, NO! **NOT ON OUR WATCH.**

Thank you.