

Report on Mike Waite's project: **Reflections, lessons and directions: Race relations, class and politics in a northern English town**

MW reviewed his experience of work in Burnley as a local government officer. In 2002, Burnley was the first town where Nick Griffin's far-right British National Party achieved electoral success, and from that year until 2018, MW had lead responsibility in the council for work on race relations and community cohesion.

As part of his review work, MW conducted a range of interviews and held meetings with people in Burnley and London; had conversations with a range of academics and practitioners; and made a study visit to Belfast.

His review went along with systematic study on relevant areas: history of the far right; deindustrialisation; populism; theory on race and culture; social policy areas including 'multiculturalism', 'community cohesion' etc.

MW's fellowship was hosted by the School of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester, and he took part in a range of seminars, meetings and conversations there.

The task which structured and focused MW's project was to write up his reflections and learning with a view to publishing. Based on a synopsis / proposal written halfway into his ISRF project, and an emerging manuscript, the publishers Lawrence and Wishart have committed to publish his book (*projected date of publication April 2021*).

MW's work progressed broadly in line as proposed in his application (*though aspects of it needed some rescheduling in terms of timing, which was agreed in advance with ISRF staff members*). The key issues researched and explored were mostly as anticipated. One issue which 'opened up' was the relevance of long-standing aspects of political culture in Burnley (*and towns in north west England more generally*) in putting in place 'structures of feeling' that helped lay the basis for current support for populist and far-right politics (*MW had intended to present on this issue at the 'Culture and Memory' ISRF conference*). All issues being studied also needed to be assessed in the light of Burnley being one of the 'red wall' towns which went from being Labour to having a Conservative MP at the December 2019 general election, fought largely on the issue of 'Brexit'.

At March 2020, as the 'formal' period of MW's fellowship ended, three key tasks relating to the project remained to be completed:

- Focus group sessions in Burnley which were being planned for April and May 2020, and which will now be rearranged to late summer because of the coronavirus situation
- Some further research (*the University of Manchester has agreed to extend MW's access to the library and relevant seminars until the end of 2020*)

- Completion of the manuscript for the publisher (*MW's contract commits him to submit this by September 2020; there will be further development of the manuscript through across winter 2020/2021*)

MW has confirmed to the ISRF that these tasks will be carried out; that he will take part in future ISRF events to present outcomes from his project; that he will submit a piece for the ISRF blog later in the year on issues arising from his project; and that he will liaise with ISRF in disseminating outcomes from the project, e.g. promotion of the book including through launch events and meetings, and e.g. through writing a range of articles on themes covered in the project / book.

Mike Waite

April 2020