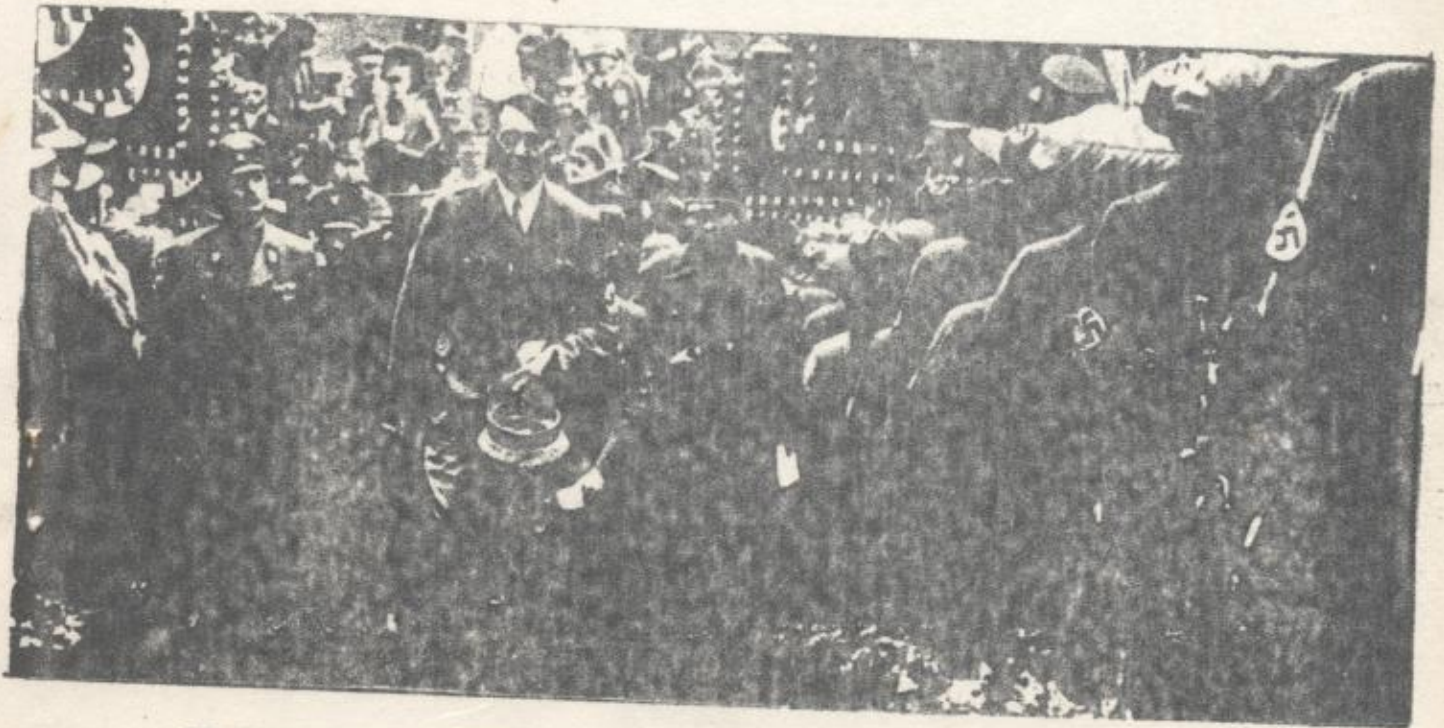


# FASCISM

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## 1: WHAT IS FASCISM.

On June 21st last year, the ex-League Communiste (French Section of the Fourth International), led a demonstration aimed at stopping *Ordre Nouveau*, the largest fascist organisation in France, from holding a meeting in Paris. The demonstration ended in street battles with the police, who were attempting to protect the fascists, and who eventually escorted the uniformed fascists away.

The League had tried to build a united front of all workers organisations against the meeting. As it became clear that the Government had no intention of banning the meeting, the Communist Party withdrew. They were not prepared to undertake the direct action proposed by the League. The *Lutte Ouvrier* (Workers Struggle) group, excused itself by claiming that 'Today, *Ordre Nouveau* represents *nothing*'. The League replied that *Ordre Nouveau* might be small but it was necessary to nip fascism in the bud. By the day of the demonstration, only a small number of Maoists were prepared to join with the League on the streets. A week later, the League was banned.

The massive defence campaign which was launched throughout Europe to defend the League, re-opened an old debate in the working class movement, the same debate now taking place in Britain around the recent NUS resolution to ban racists and fascists from the campuses, 'by any means necessary', including the disrupting of their meetings. Do the fascists really represent a serious threat? Isn't all this fuss just a product of paranoia on the left? If it *is* important to stop the fascists, how should it be done? Should we rely on the Government or carry out the job by direct action? The re-appearance of small but vigorous fascist organisations in Western Europe demands that clear answers are given to these questions.

### WHAT IS A FASCIST MOVEMENT?

Before these questions can be answered, we must try to clear away much of the confusion on the left about the nature of fascism. Many people associate fascism solely with the extermination of the Jews in Germany and Eastern Europe, others with a war economy as in Germany, Italy or Spain. Present-day Communist Party members remember the struggle against fascism as a defence of 'democratic countries' and the Soviet Union against the Axis powers. The early days of fascism, where its prime job was to crush the workers movements are little more than a hazy memory. The time when these same parties called everybody a fascist, including the social-democratic organisations, are forgotten altogether. On the other hand, some militants now apply the term 'fascist' to the police, the army, the Special Patrol Groups, the Industrial Relations Act or the Counter-Inflation laws. To complete the picture of confusion, it is also widely used to refer to any right-wing dictatorship which displaces bourgeois democracy.

### FASCISM AND THE STRONG STATE

The first point we need to get clear is the distinction between a fascist regime and the 'strong state'. The bourgeoisie may strengthen the *existing* apparatuses of repression, even to the point of placing the military in power, and still we will not necessarily find fascism. Certainly, tough measures by the 'strong state' may weaken, even seriously repress, the workers movement. But these moves cannot utterly destroy without trace all independent organisation among the workers, especially in the advanced capitalist countries. This is a job only fascism can do.

Even the toughest military rule suffers from a crucial weakness — which fascism is designed to overcome. To effectively put an end to all political life in the working class and completely crush its spirit for any length of time, requires a repressive force which is in

constant contact with the working population from which the rank and file of the army are generally drawn. This renders the army rank and file open to subversion or at least to a paralysis of will when faced with a determined crowd of demonstrators or strikers. Sooner or later, the army will be thrown onto the defensive and a workers uprising occur.

With fascism, however, things are rather different. What distinguished Hitler's brownshirts from the regular army was not their armed might, but the high degree of political fanaticism which is generally absent from a soldier. This makes it possible for a fascist movement to much more efficiently terrorise the workers movement, to spy on it, and accurately distinguish the most politicised workers, without too much danger of ideological 'infection'. In other words, the fascists are an armed force for the capitalists, like a regular army, but, unlike the army rank and file, are highly politicised, inspired with a hatred of the workers movement and ideologically committed to destroying it.

If a *mass movement* composed of such political thugs can be built and instilled in power, then it can be sufficient to settle the class struggle in favour of the capitalists for a whole historical period. That was the achievement of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. In Germany, the degree of the defeat which fascism inflicted on the working class can be measured by the rise in profits on the capital of all industrial and commercial enterprises between 1933 and 1938 — they rose from 6.6 billion marks to 15 billion marks. Hitler was able to achieve a wage freeze, which continued even after mass unemployment disappeared. But where is such a mass movement to be found? How is it born? This is what we must now turn to analysis, for the various fascist movements in Europe today represent the beginnings of just such movements.

## ORIGINS

One of the reasons why the term 'fascism' causes so much difficulty is because many people often talk as if the non-proletarian sections of the population consisted of a single, undifferentiated group of people who have no conflicting interests with one another. This is not true.

Fascist movements can only be understood in the context of the political problems confronting various small propertied groups in capitalist society — the petty-bourgeoisie. These layers are capable of achieving a remarkable degree of political independence from, and even outright hostility to, the bourgeoisie itself. It is from among these groups that a fascist movement develops, and, in its early stages at least, without any overt encouragement from big capital. The appearance of a fascist politics cannot be understood as a 'plot' by big capital, but as something which grows up independently, even if at a later stage, big capital turns to it for a variety of services or, eventually, as a last resort.

It is a constant feature of capitalism that smaller capitalists, shopkeepers, farmers and others, are driven out of business by the monopolies and the banks. The monopolies want to buy them out to concentrate and rationalise production, the banks want to milk them through debt and then strip their assets. In a really sharp conjunctural crisis of capitalism, these groups are the first to go to the wall, and they increasingly seek to organise themselves, independently of the political parties of big capital, who appear unable to solve their problems. The evolution of a figure like Enoch Powell away from the Tory Party is a symptom of this disenchantment (and the growth of the National Front among his supporters an indication of the logic of this development). At the same time, of course, these small propertied groups experience a traditional hostility to the proletariat into which they are increasingly in danger of falling. In the case of countries with a large agrarian petty-bourgeoisie, millions of people can be driven against the workers movement.

Since these small propertied groups have no economic future under capitalism, but at the same time regard the workers movement as an enemy, they are open to political ideologies which look backward rather than forward. It is here we find the material basis for political movements seeking to turn the clock back to an alleged golden age in which capitalism was healthy, the industrious owner of private property flourished, empire was stable, and the working class was kept in its place.

A reactionary popular movement of this kind builds on the sentiment, which is widespread among these groups of people, that they have been 'let down' by the two major classes in society. It must express the hatred they feel for *both*. This can only be done by reasoning that both have deviated from some pre-existing state of harmony in which both sides prospered and did not feel it necessary to unleash struggle against one another. How did this fall from grace occur, and how can the promised land be regained? Only on the basis of the most extreme *nationalism* - which this movement will accentuate in the belief that it is the last thing which the two major classes have in common. Inevitably this carries racism to its extremes. Hence there emerges a picture in which the trade unions must be crushed because of their 'selfishness' and sabotage of the 'nation'. The financiers who have 'betrayed' the country by unpatriotically shifting their capital abroad, must be brought to heel by nationalising the banks and stopping the outflow of capital. Unity of the nation against external enemies must replace internal class conflict. The nation must be defended from its rivals by war economy and purged of its internal enemies - Jews, blacks, revolutionaries (who owe allegiance to no national state) and militant workers who step up the class struggle.

Reactionary political movements of this kind are capable of picking up support from other sections of the population who do not own property as such, but whom the workers movement is unable to attract because of its political weaknesses and its co-existence with capitalism.

Middle managerial workers for example, are often thrown out of a job by capital concentration, yet they feel no great love for the workers on the shop floor whose militancy they believe was just as much to blame for the rationalisation as the tough demands of international competition or international bankers. Small shop keepers hate the big bosses for driving them out of business, but blame the inflation on the workers movement. Colonial and war veterans return from imperialist war or colonial enterprises feeling 'betrayed' by the politicians who decided to retreat, but hate the workers movement which refused to shoulder any more burdens and make any more sacrifices for the war. The unemployed have no trouble recognising that it is the bosses and bankers who gave them the sack, but what about the trade unions who negotiated their redundancy through a productivity deal?

#### A REACTIONARY MOVEMENT WITH A DIFFERENCE

A fascist movement will try to pose solutions to the problems of all these layers in its programme. They call for public works for the unemployed, a ban on export of capital, revival of empire and a policy of economic nationalism to protect those driven to the wall by international competition. Nationalisation of the banks will stop speculation and bring finance capital to order. Repatriation of immigrants will 'solve' the housing problem and the shortage of jobs, tough laws against militant workers and political parties of the left will save the 'nation' from 'anarchy' and 'bankruptcy'. The revival of bourgeois militarism will save the family virtues which reactionaries of many shades feel are being undermined.

However, none of these things are *unique* to a fascist movement. The basic points in the programme of the National Front are shared by Enoch Powell, (and indeed, many figures in

the Roty Party) right down to monetarist theories of economic crisis. Both Powell and the National Front share similar, or the same, groups of supporters. Like all fascist movements, the Front, along with Enoch Powell, also appeal to large numbers of workers who are deeply imbued with racism and national chauvinism.

However, where Powell and the Front part company is on the *methods to be employed to implement this programme*. Whereas Powell remains a firm believer in parliamentary democracy, the Front heap scorn on this institution. Like all fascists, they say that the major political parties are corrupted by big business, peopled by careerists and bureaucrats, suffer from bad racial influences, or frightened of the trade unions. They are 'soft', clinging to the rule of Parliament when the preservation of the very nation is at stake. The police are 'non-political' and too lenient. Therefore the fascists will have to do the job themselves - purify the nation and the race by *direct action*. Hence the creation of a highly politicised shock troop who are prepared for the most ruthless struggle, regardless of 'ruling class flunkies' and 'bureaucrats'. It is obvious why the fascists are able to attract workers with this characteristic rhetoric.

### VIOLENT STRUGGLE

From the very beginning, a fascist movement organises for physical struggle against what it conceives to be 'enemies of the nation'. Compared to Ordre Nouveau or the MSI in Italy, the National Front is a relatively small organisation. Yet all three are violent organisations. We document cases of this later in the pamphlet. None of this violence is accidental. For without violence, a fascist movement could not grow and develop. For what attracts a whole number of desperate and embittered people to it, is its impatience with 'peaceful' solutions, its willingness and its *evident capacity* to deal directly with the enemy.

Violence is also necessary if the fascists are attract support from those with money and influence - in other words big capital. This is in fact the supreme irony of a fascist movement. As it grows, it increasingly seeks sponsorship from the capitalists (particularly finance capital) that it professes to distrust, and even despise. The big capitalists will finance it to the extent that they find such a movement useful in inflicting political and material damage on the workers movement. The rhetoric of the fascists does not put them off. For the fascists do not after all intend to overthrow capitalism. All fascists, including the National Front, defend private property. What the fascists want to do is to shift the *polities* of capitalism to relieve the misery of their supporters, not overthrow the capitalist state or introduce planned economy. Once in power, the fascists will rule in the interests of monopoly capital, and *monopoly capital alone* - any 'radicals' among the fascist rank and file who do not fall into line will be wiped out, as were the Brownshirts in Germany (who spoke of making a 'second revolution'). But to get into power in order to shift capitalist policy, the fascists must gain the support of big capital. This they will do to the extent that they can prove their usefulness to capital - primarily through their military exploits.

### DONT BE DECEIVED BY NUMBERS

The usefulness of the fascists does not begin on the day that the fascists are invited to form a government and introduce a thousand year Reich of terror against the workers. The fascists can be useful to the big capitalists from the moment they appear. In Western Europe today, none of the fascist movements are on the verge of seizing power (although the situation in Italy is extremely dangerous). Nevertheless, all of them play a crucial role in the class struggle. Their importance is not to be gauged by their numbers. In bourgeois

society, numbers have nothing to do with power. These relatively small organisations can and do play a decisive role now. Lets look at some contemporary examples.

### ITALY - FASCIST PROVOCATIONS

In 1969, four bombs were exploded in the Bank of Agriculture in Milan. Sixteen people were killed. Several anarchists were arrested for this crime and were held for over four years while awaiting trial. But it soon became clear that the anarchists had been framed. Evidence pointing to the involvement of the MSI in the bombings quickly came to light. This was no thanks to several prominent guardians of 'law and order', such as the director of the secret affairs department of the Ministry of Interior, and the Chief of Police in Milan. These individuals, and many others in the same position, were found to have concealed evidence which pointed away from the anarchists and to the MSI. In fact the attempt to conceal this evidence was part of a widespread plot to protect the MSI - a plot involving many other prominent figures in the police, the judiciary, the army, and several key industrialists. The support enjoyed by MSI was recently highlighted in a dramatic fashion by its involvement in the abortive military coup earlier this year.

MSI documents revealed the purpose of the bombings - of which there have been hundreds since in many parts of Italy. 'They were part of a 'strategy of tension'. By creating panic and uncertainty, the bombings gave the trade union leaders an excuse to tone down the workers struggle, and in some cases call off strikes altogether (The biggest wave of bombings occur in Italy during the period when the unions renegotiate their contracts). 'Secondly, the government is able to move to the right without provoking the outcry which would otherwise occur. 'And finally, the government is able to launch a massive repression against the left. 'At the end of 1972, the revolutionary left in Italy calculated that *seventy per cent* of its entire membership were either in prison, on trial or facing charges for a variety of political offences (few of them anything to do with bombings). The services which the MSI have rendered to capital are obvious for all to see, even though the MSI is not yet in power.

### FRANCE AND BRITAIN - IMMIGRANT WORKERS

In June of last year, immigrant workers holding a demonstration in the town of Grasse were attacked by a joint force of police and fascists. Not only were they driven off the streets, they were dragged from their homes and beaten up in a pogrom which lasted for twelve hours. This was the work of Ordre Nouveau.

In France, as well as to a lesser extent in Britain, the fascists have played a vital role in the immigrant labour policy of capital. Ever since the Fifties, the economic needs of Western Europe have attracted workers from the countries devastated by imperialism. 'These workers are forced to accept the jobs in Europe which white workers have 'deserted', which are unattractive, low paid or destructive of the worker (public transport, chemicals, auto assembly lines etc). They are also the first to go out the door in times of redundancy, and often out of the country too, for their work permits are often tied to their entry permits. 'This creates a pool of workers who are super-exploited and used to regulate the employment cycle. In Germany, the recession of 1967 resulted in 250,000 immigrant workers being expelled.

The success of this operation depends on the white workers having the feeling that they are an 'aristocracy'. 'This makes it possible for the black workers to be isolated and treated with such blatant discrimination. But it also depends on an apparatus of repression. After May 68 for instance, thousands were deported from France for not remaining 'neutral' in the

troubles. The German government was recently considering a law to prevent immigrants from holding meetings. The Immigration Act in Britain, which brings British law into line with that on the continent, subjects new immigrant workers to police checks and removes any guarantees of settlement.

The racism of the white workers and large numbers among the petty-bourgeoisie, also contributes to this apparatus of repression. This is of a more 'unofficial' type, but just as useful and necessary to the bourgeoisie. Intimidation by fascist workers in the trade unions is more demoralising to the blacks than intimidation by the police, since it makes the immigrants feel that their strongest potential ally, the white workers, will never be purged of their racism. 'It makes struggle against unequal wages and job conditions a thousand times more difficult. 'The fascists in the French car plants, the NF members in the textile industries of Lancashire and Leicestershire, — industries where large numbers of immigrants are employed — play precisely the role of organising this particular type of intimidation and repression.'

They are certainly better suited in this task than the police force (although for the time being the police force are indispensable when it comes to controlling the black communities). Like the members of the NF and the Monday Club in British universities who pass on information concerning the political activities of foreign students to the Home Office, the fascists in the factories employing black labour, are on the spot all the time, unlike the police. And the fascists are more sophisticated than the police. They can identify the most political elements — the 'troublemakers' — among the blacks much more efficiently than the police. Already we see here the surveillance role that the fascists would play if they came to power. 'The fascists are also far more dedicated in the task than the police.' It would be National Front members who would jump quickest at Jim Merrick's offer of £100 reward for the longest list of 'illegal immigrants' for a sample. It would be the NF members in the civil service who would be the most diligent in picking up information on immigrants using the social services and feeding this back to the Home Office. And it would be people who shared the National Front's views who carry out the firebombings of black people's homes in South London and elsewhere. The fascists can do many jobs that the police can't do — at least not officially — and do them better and without tarnishing further the image that the police have among black workers (That would be to destroy 'community relations')

#### NATIONAL FRONT STRATEGY

The fascists prove useful in Britain not only in the prosecution and implementation of existing immigration policy, but also in forcing further racist legislation on to the statute book. When the Tories were in office, they found themselves losing the support of large areas of their petty-bourgeois social base. Many who held property, especially small capitalists, were driven into bankruptcy by entry into the EEC. This created a desperate problem for the Tory Cabinet when it came to the capacity of local Tory Party organisation to play its role in elections. But the Tories could give no concessions to supporters when it came to the EEC — this was a policy essential to big capital. Nevertheless, the Tory Cabinet was able to give concessions on race policy, and duly passed the retroactive ruling. Robert Carr sent out instructions to local government administration and the civil service to supply the information needed to hunt down the 'illegals'. The Pakistan Act became law, making it impossible for many immigrants to hold jobs in the civil service, and Kenyan Asians with UK passports were finally told not to bother applying for entry to the UK. The National Front and the Monday Club kept the racist pot boiling among Tory Party supporters, and allowed the Cabinet to carry through this strategy. The National Front has now taken much of the kudos for the train of reactionary moves by the Tory Cabinet.

With the break from the Tory Party by Enoch Powell, the National Front can render a really vital service to big capital. What Powell is hoping to do is win a base of support among the working class sufficiently large to win away a section of the support which has traditionally gone to the Labour Party. This is extremely useful for big capital if it can work. For it would allow Labour to be defeated decisively in a future election, and leave the road open once again for a tough government, made up from some combination of Tory-Liberal-Powellite forces. The basis on which Powell hopes to carry this off is by building an alliance with the Ulster loyalists and reactionaries in Britain, winning over in the process a number of British workers who have ties and links with Protestant reaction in Northern Ireland, as well as by exploiting the more traditional racist demagogy (whose effectiveness will increase with Britain facing 1-million unemployed). In this operation, the National Front will act as running dogs. Already the Front have links with the UDA and the UVF, and the recent NF assault on the Manchester Martyrs March was intended for Protestant eyes and ears. The trade union base of the NF will now, no doubt, be thrown into action on the Irish issue.

**DONT IGNORE THEM - STOP THEM NOW**

So we can see that the fascists in Western Europe today, while not being on the verge of taking power, play a role in the class struggle which cannot be ignored and which has little to do with their numbers and a lot to do with their social location and ability to carry on physical struggle. They perform a variety of services for the capitalists today. The more useful they become today in doing these errands, the more seriously will the bourgeoisie take them tomorrow when they put themselves forward for power. By proving their reliability now, they hope to prepare for the days when the experiments being made by the bourgeoisie with the 'strong state', come to nought. They must be stopped now before it is too late. We shall take up in a moment how this is to be done. First, let's look more closely at the National Front.

1. It would be impossible for them to rule in the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie, since the petty bourgeoisie cannot construct a new mode of production. For the most part the fascists fail to solve the problems of the petty-bourgeoisie by taking over the management of monopoly capitalism. Capital concentration continues under fascism. If anything, it accelerates. A significant number of the fascist cadres will find posts in the state apparatus, now bloated out with spies and terror specialists of many kinds. Unemployment may be resolved, but only at the cost of lowering the wages of other workers, and throwing the country into war

Footnote: Since this chapter was written, it has emerged that Giscard d'Estaing, the main bourgeois candidate in the French Presidential election has not forgotten the fascists - two hundred members of Ordre Nouveau were acting as his paid 'stewarding force'.



## 2: THE NATIONAL FRONT TURNS 'LEFT'

'Miners right, Government wrong' ran a headline in the December 1973 issue of 'Spearhead', the paper of the National Front: 'the claim of the miners for more pay is in fact a thoroughly justified one in the light of galloping inflation and of the harsh conditions of work that are inherent in the industry'. While careful to distinguish their support from that of the 'politically motivated troublemakers in the coal industry', this new policy of the Front, the largest of the fascist organisations in Britain, is taken deadly seriously.

Today, the National Front repeatedly screams: 'we are a working class organisation,' and is setting out to give flesh and blood to that claim. Times without number in recent months it has thrown its weight into the effort to infiltrate the social struggles, the organisation, the atmosphere of the working class. And it believes that it is learning fast how the task may be accomplished.

'Their literature contains violently expressed regurgitation of the class struggle, as set out in any handbook of revolution,' cries an astonished Tory dignitary in North London's Wood Green area. This was a week after National Front activists had noisily burst into a genteel Conservative summer fete in Sidcup, addressed by Edward Heath and Dame Patricia Hornsby-Smith and yelled abuse at 'the worst traitors this country has ever known'. What lies behind this vehement anti-Tory line, and the increasing fervour of the National Front to gain entrance into the ranks of the proletariat?

### SOCIAL CRISIS

'Most British people realise that our national situation is truly desperate, economically and in every other way. They won't be fobbed off with soft soap from newspaper scribblers any more than from parliamentary babblers. They want new men and new policies and they want them soon'. This comment from September's Spearhead, although buried amongst the paper's usual diet of claptrap ('The Pearson flag, foisted upon Canadians without their consent, is a sorry imitation of the Peruvian Merchant Navy flag, devoid of heraldic meaning'), illustrates the Front's air of urgency.

In the face of fierce inflation and a rapidly deteriorating balance of payments, the economic thumbscrews of wage restrictions and rising rents, price levels and mortgage interest rates, have been applied to the working class by British capitalism. The current retaliatory struggles of important sections of workers have induced a major crisis, admitted by observers from all sides. The NF is not so blind as to miss that message.

Ears straining for every round of class warfare, the Front is fashioning its own armour for this particular type of battle, and in the classic traditions of the European fascism, at such times it dons the inappropriate campaign costumes of the militant left.

The detailed selection of precisely which items of socialist clothing to wear, is of course, a matter requiring some advice, but knowledgeable experts are to hand. On the National Directorate of the NF we find Michael Lobb (selected as the Front's candidate in Newham South, London, in last year's election) who claims rich experience from former membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Alongside him on the Directorate is John Fairhurst from Southall with a long record of trade union activity.

The NF is developing two such lines of 'left wing' activity: agitation inside trade unions on carefully selected 'militant' themes, and 'community politics'. Such shifts to the 'left' by the NF are compatible with their own stated ideology (they claim to be neither 'left' nor 'right' but, as nationalists, above such categories), and with their hidden hopes of securing in the course of time cash from certain capitalist circles.

## MILITANT TRADE UNIONISM

Their basic attitude to trade unionism as such is clear. The National Front 'strongly supports the trade union movement' wrote one member to the Bucks Free Press (9 November 1973) and similar statements abound.

In an 'Open Letter to Trade Unionists' published in December 1971, the NF explained the policies on major union issues which they offered prior to their present 'left phase: "We have in fact supported in principle the legislation proposed by both this Government and the last Labour Government to make certain issues in industrial relations subject to outside arbitration.. it is in the interests of industry as a whole". This public attitude to such measures as the Industrial Relations Act has now altered in tone, and the new emphasis is on 'workers rights'.

The May 1973 Spearhead interviews an NF leader: "What is your attitude to the Industrial Relations Act? Answer: 'As with the wage and price freeze, it is bound to fail.' The NF spokesman points to alternative proposals: 'profit sharing.. assures the workers in efficient firms better pay...workers partnership has the same effect.' This type of concept provides the Front with industrial policies which are obviously more attractive to sections of rank and file unionists; policies around which industrial support for the NF can be built.

This spld. of 'left' trade union militancy is in fact carried through in the name of some profit-sharing, paternalistic alternative to the fire and thunder of the class struggle stimulated by the confrontationist strategy of big capital, with its wages freezes and anti-union legislation. This allows the NF to support the defensive aims of the trade union movement while still appealing to the small capitalists who feel engulfed by the struggle taking place all around them. This is a difficult path to follow, for the Liberal Party has gained enormous support in the past year from small capitalists who want to buy off their workers with paternalistic integrationist schemes rather than face annihilation in the Armageddon of general strikes and depression. Nevertheless, the NF is able to offer something that the Liberals can't: strong arm men in the factories to keep an eye on the 'trouble-makers' and 'reds' who are using the chances offered by the turmoil into which the country has been thrown.

A contributor to the April 1973 Spearhead illustrated the line and language we can now expect from these self-styled 'racialist trade unionists': "Whilst recognising that there have been unreasonable demands made by some bodies of workers, nevertheless in a situation where justified demands for increased wages and pensions are being made by the poorer sections of the community, we must stand firmly against a Government whose main concern is to ensure that increases in business costs are borne by those least able to bear them."

Demagogic militancy of this kind clearly has an appeal to mainly weakly organised and low-paid groups of workers (often in the same industries as our small Commonwealth orientated capitalists, but also in the social services). It neatly combines resentment against the Tory Party over inflation with an explanation for the suspicion felt by some weakly organised workers that the more powerful unions are 'ruining the country' - that the selfish reds are behind it all.

But the real appeal of the NF to these sections of the working class lies in the way it ties their economic struggles to anti-immigrant and anti-EEC themes. A recent NF statement reads: "Widespread industrial action urged to back sugar workers - 3,000 sugar refinery workers at the Silvertown and North Woolwich works face redundancies due to the European Common Market. The National Front in Newham is convinced that both public understanding and inter-union solidarity are necessary to make the sugar-workers' fight effective. We are now producing a leaflet entitled Sweet Talk, which is intended for trade unionists in other local industries. In view of the foregoing the National

Front in Newham are making a special point of issuing the Sweet Talk leaflet through the docks asking dockworkers to 'black all European cargoes if Parliament insists upon betraying British sugar-cane refinery workers'. 'Newham National Front contends that British workers will only defend their national-class interests by joint industrial and political action.' (Spearhead, December 1973)

In short the workers must stand with 'the nation' behind protectionist barricades. Not that the appeal is crude. The statement warns workers against the sugar employers' potential 'disloyalty'. They will 'switch to importing sugar refined from beet in Europe' should the present round of talks fail and 'abandon their workers'. And the appeal for industrial solidarity action, previously sought by the Front in their 'campaign to black Irish goods to avenge Ulster's fallen loyalists, demonstrates neatly the willingness of the NF at this stage to take up the struggle against the employers, especially 'unpatriotic' ones. Because of the widespread opposition to the EEC on a chauvinist basis among the working class, the NF has plenty of room for manoeuvre.

but it is the link between the new militancy and the old racialism which the NF have perfected most. Here the analysis is very sophisticated: 'The Tory ideal of cheap labour is still cherished in their hearts: there is a shortage of labour on the whole London Transport system for one simple reason - the pay is not good enough. In the Fifties, this problem was solved easily by encouraging the large-scale immigration to this country by West Indian workers...to keep wages down' stated an NF activist (Eastern Daily Press 6 November 1973) in a standard commentary.

The point is not without foundation. The employers do indeed use immigrant workers as a cheap labour force, through which they hope to depress the general level of wages. All too often however, the white working class have tolerated or supported the racial discrimination on the job practiced by the employers. Instead of fighting alongside black workers to achieve equality in jobs and conditions and wages, the white workers have demanded repatriation as a way of defending their own position.

But let no one forget that the National Front, like all fascists in their early days, may try to win over workers by making a distinction between trade unionists on the basis of colour or ideology. But tomorrow, as finance capital makes a turn to the fascists, the fascists will not hesitate to destroy all independent trade union activity. For the historical function of the fascists is to violently and dramatically increase the rate of exploitation. For the present, the fascists are only strong enough to weaken the trade union movement by helping to deepen the existing racist divisions through launching attacks on black workers and isolating the left through ideological and physical assault.

## COMMUNITY POLITICS

Beyond the trade unions, among the often unorganised working class inhabitants confronted with different social problems, the Front is playing a new tune. Across those areas of London faced with massive disruption by property speculators (known officially as 'dockland redevelopment schemes'), the NF is initiating an interesting campaign. Among their propaganda points are: 'The working class character of the area be preserved by the provision of a majority of council-owned rented houses in any development scheme'. 'A tough line against land speculators and property sharks'. 'White British people be given priority in all re-housing'.

This admixture of attitudes based on class interest and others based on skin colour, is designed to allow the fascists to move more freely among workers influenced by the growing movement against the destruction of the old dockland communities - a broad

movement currently led in the direction of 'pressure' politics by a coalition of social democrats, church leaders, and Communist Party members and therefore relatively 'easy' to infiltrate. Other signs of the NF's sudden, opportunist conversion to 'community politics' have appeared. Out of the blue, yesterday's rag-bag of ex-nazis and racist fanatics are running polite local campaigns to save the old facade of Leicester's London Road railway station from demolition, to raise money for a wireless intercom system for lonely old-age pensioners, to appeal for the re-housing of elderly inhabitants of a slum terrace in Sutton, and other equally worthy causes. These fine sentiments, these charitable endeavours, spring less from devotion to the environment and the plight of the poor, than from the deliberate search of the National Front for new inroads into local communities, new means to convey the old message of racial nationalism into the homes of the working class.

## BEYOND ENGLAND

The winning of firm roots beyond England, in other parts of the UK is necessary if the NF is ever to become a real force in British politics, and more urgent than ever following Powell's latest turn.

Mosley's British Union of Fascists, at the height of its upsurge in the late 1930s, never extended seriously into Wales or the North of Ireland, despite its glorification of Sir Edward Carson's Ulster Volunteers of 1911, as fascist forefathers 'in bearing, will, act and thought'. Modern conditions, however, present the National Front with rare opportunities which they are anxious to seize. While their infant forces in Scotland have yet to find their feet (the NF is under pressure from Scottish members to join with the Nationalist movement there, but opposes this as 'un-British') the NF is fully conscious of the possibilities created by the and dramatic crisis of Ulster Unionism.

Longstanding Front agitation in the traditional areas of the English Midlands, Greater London and around the South Coast, now reaches further afield. In June, a candidate was rushed into the elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly in South Down, a 'National Front Loyalist'. Despite poor support at the polls, they saw this first effort in Ulster as 'a real base for promoting branches of the NF throughout Northern Ireland'.

This represents something of a shift from the situation on 1 May 1972, when Martin Webster spoke for the Front alongside William Craig at a Vanguard rally in London, decorated with the banners of the Orange Order and the NF. As Unionism changes and splits under the challenge of the minority in the North of Ireland, the NF has been rejecting alliances with this or that formation in the Orange camp, and attempting independent initiatives. These have no doubt made their impression on UDA branches in the Midlands, and the Orange Lodges in working class areas such as Glasgow and Merseyside. It remains to be seen how the NF will line up in Ulster now.

## AGAINST THE LEFT

Infiltrating working class areas and institutions, the fascists will inevitably clash with the left forces entrenched there. The new-found confidence of the NF, as it counts its votes and membership figures, enables the organisation to consider mounting an offensive against sections of the socialist left. Some moves in this direction have already been made. A dozen or so NF members picketed a meeting organised by the South East London Institute for Workers Control in Lewisham in July, and boasted to the local papers about 'fighting communism on its own ground'. In January this year, NF members assaulted several members of the CPB (M/L) in Brighton and smashed up their premises.

The Front has materialised in certain colleges, peddling a student oriented paper entitled SPARK. The task of the magazine and its supporters, working in a social milieu which the NF frequently admits is dominated by the left and near-hopeless for extreme-right agitation, is to provoke and damage socialist forces in the student field.

This type of activity, reflecting the general optimism and current expansion of the organisation, naturally inspires the various thug elements in and around the Front to engage in wilder adventures. Telephone threats to the Labour Party Young Socialists in Gloucester, the beating-up and near-blinding of a black student in Nottingham University by right wingers, an assault on a photographer who discovered a secret fascist meeting in Caxton Hall, all point to a rising level of violent activity on the part of the right.

On November 22 last year, the Front picketed and hurled abuse at black speakers at a meeting of the Barnet Community Relations Council on North London, one member remarking: 'It is shocking that the British people don't feel any repulsion against contact with coloured people.' (Edgware Times, 30 November, 1973). In the same month, NF supporters were involved in an incident in a local by-election in Rochdale, where a Labour councillor claims he was intimidated. In the February general election, the Front made threats in several areas to break up Labour Party meetings.

This new atmosphere pervades other circles on the far-right. British Crusade, a duplicated rag close to Colin Jordan's 'British Movement', has announced the formation of a 'force of trained men' (modestly calling themselves 'The Defence') to 'carry out the duties that police are unable to do due to their non-political nature.' Such phenomena apart, the left must bear in mind the distinct possibility of an NF campaign against socialist meetings and events, dragging in its wake the most vicious of the individual hangers-on of the fascist right. The left and black students on the campuses will be attacked if the NUS Executive capitulates to the bourgeois press over the current NUS resolution opposing free speech for fascists and racists, thereby splitting the student body and leaving the left dangerously isolated in some of the more backward universities and colleges.

These significant developments on the extreme right require a positive and determined response by every tendency on the left. Each National Front initiative, each fascist mobilisation, must be replied to with the maximum strength which only united action can make possible.

The recent complete routing of Colin Jordan's attempted rally at Liverpool's Pier Head reminds us of the first principle of anti-fascist struggle: no public platform for the extreme right-wing. For this principle to operate in the coming months, given the new direction of the NF, the issue of anti-fascist action **MUST BE INCLUDED** in the plans of different socialist organisations for combatting current and potential ruling class attacks on the working class. Otherwise, in a relatively short time, and without the left being adequately prepared, such action will be forced upon the workers movement as the fascists are given more and more time to select their targets.

### 3: NO PLATFORM FOR RACISTS AND FASCISTS

From everything we have said about the fascists, it should be clear why we are in favour of putting a stop to their agitation and to their organisational capabilities. This is really what we mean when we talk about 'no platform for fascists and racists'. It should also be clear that depriving fascists of a platform and stopping them from organising publicly, inevitably involves a level of physical confrontation. This is unavoidable, for even those who do not seek to deprive the fascists of a platform cannot avoid the necessity of organising themselves when subjected to physical attack - something which is equally inevitable.

Of course, we should say straight away, that fighting fascism is not *only* about this. To emphasise this at the expense of the political and ideological struggle would be suicidal. Nevertheless, it is necessary to give special emphasis to the 'military' side of things when dealing with fascism, because it is on this side of the coin that the greatest political weaknesses, even on the far left, are to be found. It is on this side of things that the bulk of this chapter is forced to concentrate.

#### SELF-DEFENCE

We have pointed out that there is little in the programme of the fascists which is unique. What is essential a fascist movement however, is its capacity to carry out violence, and to do this from the very earliest days of its development. In fact, its growth depends on its success at this sort of activity. What the fascists are saying to the petty-bourgeoisie and to the racist workers is: 'Look, Enoch Powell is all very well, but he cannot deliver the goods through Parliament - only we can do that by our ability to directly attack the enemy'. And to the big bourgeoisie, the fascists are saying: 'Give us financial and political support, give us cover for our crimes, and we will repay your investment a hundred fold. We will do considerable damage to the workers movement for you. You may not be prepared to put us in power yet, but we hope to show you through our actions that we are reliable - and sooner or later we believe you will turn to us when your need is desperate'.

It follows from this that if the workers movement suffers physical attack without self-defence and retaliation, and without educating itself thoroughly against the fascists, the fascists will only be encouraged by such signs of weakness. Failure to defend ourselves only encourages the fascists. If on the other hand, the workers movement meets force with force, the fascists will quickly become demoralised. The solution of direct struggle which they offer to the petty-bourgeoisie will lose its credibility. The petty-bourgeoisie would be forced to look elsewhere for leadership. And the bourgeoisie will certainly decline to throw its money away on a group of people who cannot even organise publicly, let alone whip the workers in open battle! The fascists have understood this basic process, if the left hasn't. Hitler, for example, said in 1933: 'Only one thing could have stopped our movement - if our adversaries had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed, with the most extreme brutality, the nucleus of our new movement'.

Many people will say: 'OK, if the fascists attack us we will defend ourselves and retaliate in an effort to crush them and prevent them from attacking us again. We admit that the National Front, Ordre Nouveau and MSI, are carrying out these physical attacks. But surely it is doing no harm to allow them to hold peaceful public meetings? After all, there is the question of freedom of speech'.

However, this is an artificial distinction - we bear in mind the essential nature of a fascist movement. For what is the basic content of fascist speeches? The

fascist is saying that 'enemies of the nation' - Jews, blacks, militant workers etc - should be crushed by every possible means, especially illegal ones, since parliament and the police cannot be relied on to do the job. In other words, the fascist is advocating the use of violence against the workers movement. Even if the fascist groups themselves don't carry it out, their agitation stirs up social violence against the workers movement. The same is true, in fact, of racists. Enoch Powell for example had no organisational links with the skinheads, but his speeches undoubtedly played their part in stirring up their anti-Asian campaign of violence. Fascism inevitably carries violence in its train because the people to whom it appeals are looking for a drastic solution to their problems.

The point we made in the first chapter about power having nothing to do with numbers in bourgeois society, should reinforce this point. The racist and the fascist are not simply out to win over large numbers of people to their point of view. They are advocating a particular path of struggle for certain groups in society who carry a weight and influence which bears no relationship to their size. The influence which the NF and the Monday Club have had on the Tory Party, and the success of the MSI bombing campaign in Italy, are proof of this. They are saying to the petty-bourgeoisie: 'these are your enemies, you must join us and fight them, and our small bands will prevail because the workers movement is defenceless and reluctant to fight back so do not worry about the numerical relation of forces'. And to the bourgeoisie, the fascists are saying: 'This is the course you should adopt - divide the working class by carrying through tough anti-immigrant laws and putting all these militant workers and left-wing agitators in jail - exterminate them'. In the interests of self-defence, it is advisable to stop people from putting this sort of advice about.

The essential point then about self-defence is to demoralise your opponent and destroy his confidence in himself and his chosen course of struggle. By doing this, you destroy his ability to win support and influence.

### LETS PUT ASIDE OUR DIFFERENCES

On the basis of this very concrete analysis of the opponent, we have established the essential principle of anti-fascist struggle. This principle should override all ideological differences within the workers movement. It is necessary to immediately form a united front for self-defence of all those forces prepared to fight against the fascists and put a stop to their development.

These ideological differences are of course very deep. When the capitalist press tries to stop the students from organising a united front to stop the fascists, by pointing to the fact that the revolutionary left in the united front are willing to suppress platforms not just for racists and fascists, but to the Tory Party, the CBI, the generals and so on (in other words the bourgeoisie), we have to be very clear and honest about the way we respond to this. Of course, it is absolutely true that revolutionaries stand for the suppression, not just of the fascists, but of the bourgeoisie as a whole, while many others who recognise the danger of fascism do not believe that this suppression is necessary. A huge number of people believe that it is possible to legislate away the capitalist class through Parliament, and to make socialist revolution peacefully. Revolutionaries do not believe this. Nevertheless, differences should not stand in the way of the fight against the fascists. For while the bourgeoisie (in Britain) is not about to launch a military coup and confront the working class with a fight to the death - and therefore many people can retain their illusions in peaceful methods of struggle as a solution to their problems - the same thing does not hold true for the fascists. The fascists are a

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threat to our liberties *now* - not tomorrow or the day after, but *now*. It is on the basis of this particular fact that unity should be built, among students and workers of many different political persuasions against the fascists.

### ABSTRACT MORAL FORMULAS

The bourgeois politicians and the Fleet Street scribblers try to prevent students from forming such a united front for self-defence, not only by trying to frighten people with the spectre of 'leftist thuggery', but also by confusing the issue with abstract moral formula about 'free speech'. They are joined in this endeavour by liberal organisations such as the National Campaign for Civil Liberties, now so busy telling students that they should allow racists and fascists to speak on the campuses and reverse the NUS decision.

But this appeal to 'moral principles' by Fleet Street and Westminster, is nothing but a lot of hypocrisy. We don't have to look far to discover evidence for this. When the NUS took its recent decision, the editorialists of *The Times*, for example, told us that they could 'appreciate the strong and generous feelings' behind the resolution, but 'any move to restrict what may be talked about - in a university more than anywhere - is profoundly dangerous'. (16.474 )

Yet, as it turns out, the *Times* doesn't actually adhere to this position itself. On the very same page, our lofty democrats were telling Mr Eric Heffer to shut his big mouth over the issue of warships to Chile's junta: 'He has grabbed for himself a freedom to sound off in a way that other more senior ministers may well have felt tempted to do, but have managed to resist... out of respect for the solidarity of the Government'... and, they add, out of respect for 'future prospects for arms sales in Latin America'.

Since the *Times* makes it quite obvious that it doesn't believe in freedom of speech, on what criteria does it decide what 'may be talked about'? Perhaps their decision has something to do with the fact that *The Times* is in favour of arms sales to the Chilean junta? The *Times* is all in favour of those who want to supply the junta with the means to kill workers and peasant, from saying as much. But when it comes to those who disagree with this position, it is opposed to them making their voice heard!

On what basis do the government and the press decide what may or may not be said in a strike? On the basis of free speech for everybody? If that were the case, then how could we explain that the Government feels free to attack strikers day in and day out, yet reacts strongly when Mick McGahey decided he was going to speak freely to the soldiers of the British Army about the role they would be asked to play in breaking the miners' strike? They decide these questions on the basis of the concrete needs of their struggle against the workers movement, not moral formulas.

It is not difficult for them to ensure that 'free speech' means *in practice* freedom of speech for them, and restriction of freedom for others. First of all, they enjoy a monopoly over the means of speech. It is not often that you see the front pages of the big national dailies turned over to the trade unions to express their side of the story. Secondly, they are able to control access to information, without which nobody can form a sound opinion, let alone communicate it to anybody else. After all, the big monopolies and the government both systematically exclude the population who have to suffer from their decisions from gaining access to information about these decisions. This is done by establishing laws relating to

commercial secrecy and to secrecy in the interests of 'state security'. Finally, the bourgeoisie have a monopoly over the right to *silence* any effective criticism or opposition, since they claim a monopoly over the means of legitimate violence. In other words, the *formal* existence of free speech in no way indicates any real *equality* with regard to the ability to speak. The notion that everybody should have equal access to the platform, that everybody should have *effective voice*, is not exactly an ideal which the capitalists, and their free speaking friends in Fleet Street, are striving to put into practice.

In any case, 'free speech' - the right of assembly, right of press etc - is not something which dropped from the sky. It is something which the workers movement had to fight to establish. There is therefore no reason at all why it should extend the privilege to those who intend to take these rights away from the workers movement. The question has to be decided concretely, and in the case of fascists and racists, the issue is clear. In the same way, the bourgeoisie tolerates the workers having the 'right to assembly', but it certainly doesn't draw from this the conclusion that it should *always* tolerate it simply because the relation of forces doesn't allow it to take these rights away from the workers movement now. If the bourgeoisie operated on the basis of such abstract formulas then the existence of military coups and fascist takeovers would become inexplicable.

#### AND THE SAME GOES FOR VIOLENCE

By indulging in the hypocrisy of abstract moral formulas, the bourgeoisie have already succeeded in confusing the Executive of the NUS over the issue of violence. The press has correctly pointed out that the NUS resolution to stop fascists and racists 'by any means necessary' inevitably involves force. The NUS Executive has replied that 'we are not going to send round a heavy squad' to break up meetings. In other words, instead of using 'any means necessary', the NUS is advising students to use solely peaceful means to deprive these people of a platform.

But the capitalist don't decide the question in this way. A thousand examples from the realm of 'law enforcement' would illustrate the point. Did the police at Oxford University say: 'We have to go along to Oxford university to ensure that when the bulldogs evict students from the Indian Institute, they do it peacefully'? Presumably, standing by while bulldogs attacked students with hammers, and then joining in with them as the students were being driven out, constitute peaceful tactics and respect for law and order. When it comes to deciding on a military coup, whether to send in the Special Patrol Group, to shoot 13 defenceless persons in Derry, or whether millions should be killed in Vietnam, all moral questions come to nothing. Only the concrete needs of the struggle count.

#### RACISTS TOO

It is necessary at the present time to extend the 'no platform' position to racists as well as fascists. There are of course many racists who are not themselves fascists. Nevertheless, racists like Enoch Powell, have the same effect as the fascists. They stir up social violence - legal and illegal - against minorities. They do not always consciously intend this. Nevertheless the effect is the same. This is why we must stop the racists too. Furthermore, the racists provide a respectable cover for the fascist violence. When the racist workers at Mansfield

Hosiery Mills allowed the fascists to create a cell in the factory last year, many of them may not have known that the 'Powell Supporters Group' was actually a front for the National Front. When Professor Eyesenck puts forward 'scientific' opinions to 'prove' that blacks are genetically inferior to whites, his views may be treated as those of a crank by the majority of the academic establishment. Nevertheless, Eyesenck is quoted as gospel truth in all the fascist literature.

Therefore, if we approach this question concretely, there can only be one conclusion. To defend black people from attack - whether by fascists or others -- we must stop racist agitators before they do any more damage, never mind 'free speech'.

#### WHERE POLITICAL DIFFERENCES DO COUNT

So far we have stressed the need for a united front for self-defence throughout this chapter, irrespective of whether you believe in the parliamentary road to socialism, revolution, or no road at all. However, these differences are not without influence on *how* defence can best be ensured. For those who believe in the parliamentary road believe that the state is 'neutral' in the class struggle, and therefore it seems perfectly logical to them that the state can be used to defend us from the fascists and racists.

This is an old question, and the verdict of history comes down on the side of those who believe in *self*-defence -- defence of the workers movement by the workers movement. No doubt individual cases can be found where the police haul off a fascist heckler or prosecute him for carrying lethal weapons. But the question cannot be answered at this level. For it should be obvious that the police have no great love for the workers movement, and even less for other targets of fascist attack, such as black people. Many a blind eye will be turned, even assuming the police are around when an attack is launched. In Spain and Germany, it was among these very forces of law and order, the army and the police, that the fascists drew much of their support, war material, etc. The same thing is clear if we look at Italy and Chile today.

Apart from the sympathies of the police themselves, there is another question. The police and armed forces are governed by the policy decisions of big capital -- either directly or through governmental intermediaries. It would be incorrect to imagine that these forces represent any kind of shield against fascists, for as the fascists acquire strength and powerful backs, the police and armed forces will increasingly be encouraged to either take no action at all or covertly support the fascists. The corruption of the police in relation to the MSI makes the point vividly enough.

This is why even where it appears technically possible to defend a meeting or a demonstration with the aid of the police, self-reliance should be encouraged instead. With fascism it is not just a matter of stopping the assaults of today, but stopping those of tomorrow, which are always much worse. If we encourage reliance on the police and the courts today, we will disarm ourselves for the attacks of tomorrow, when the police will not be around. Defence of meetings and demonstrations today is not therefore a matter which should be approached pragmatically, according to the circumstances of the moment, but as an issue in which political preparation of the movement is involved. Furthermore, when workers *do* attempt to defend themselves with the most reliable means, that is by their own action, it will soon be clear whose side the police are actually on.

All these points should demonstrate the futility of the view that the way to stop fascists is to pass laws against them. Apart from their unenforceability, such laws will not be against 'fascists'. They will be against 'extra-parliamentary agitation', or against the private ownership of weapons. In other words, such laws

will be used, not against the right, but against the left. The effect of these laws is therefore to literally disarm the workers movement the more it needs to defend itself against an array of opponents who increasingly work in close collaboration with another

All the same points could be made about racists. Racism among the police is well-known and well-documented. The police are not going to be reliable defendants of black people. Neither has the Race Relations Act stopped Enoch Powell or Professort Eyesenck, but it has been used to prosecute those who have been the victims of racism and have spoken out against their oppression.

Finally, of course, fascists are not the most 'law-abiding' people around.

Despite ideological differences over the road to socialism, however, recent experience has shown that a united front to mobilise against the fascists - a united front which includes the Communist Party, an organisation believing in the parliamentary road - is possible, even if it only comes about by the fear that reformists have of being outflanked on the left. The Communist Party and Labour Party militants who enter such a united front do not do so on the basis of political consistency - for independent action against fascism is inconsistent with their overall politics of their organisations - but on the basis of recognising the practical needs of the immediate struggle. This united front should not be broken because these differences exist. They will be resolved in the course of struggle

#### EDUCATION VITAL

In organising against fascists, it is vital that everybody understands why they are fighting. It is not possible to put 'no platform' into practice without creating a relation of forces adequate to the task. This is why the question of depriving people of a platform should never be done in a bureaucratic or administrative fashion. Whenever a student union deprives a speaker of a platform through exercising managerial prerogative, the union must ensure that every student is clear about the issues, otherwise the legal and physical repression which can result will succeed in finding a target. The same is true in the unions. Removing fascists from trade union posts (irrespective of other 'good works' they might perform) should not be done by bureaucratic short cuts, or by finding some technical ruse to remove credentials. These sorts of actions are best taken on the grounds that a person is a racist or fascist, and everybody should know that fact. To do it by some administrative or technical ruse will educate nobody, and only give the bureaucracy a weapon against the left or militants in general. It will also give the extreme right a further argument against the unions - they use administrative means to deal with political issues instead of dealing with them in a democratic manner!

#### POLITICS AND FORCE

This brings us directly on to the other side of the coin of anti-fascist struggle: the ideological and political struggle against fascist ideas. This by no means implies of course that it is necessary to *debate* with fascists. By so doing we would only give them a platform for further agitation and incitement. We know perfectly well what their ideas are. The task is not to try to convince *them* that their ideas are wrong, but to stop them spreading their agitation at the same time as conducting a continuous struggle against racism and national chauvinism among their potential supporters.

At the same time as applying no platform we have to conduct the political struggle. We should never counterpose these two tasks, saying that one is necessary and the other not. Similarly, we should not confuse them, as is done when people argue that we should allow the fascists a platform in order to combat their ideas. The truth of the matter is that we don't need the fascists to be around in order to combat their ideas. The workers movement has its own resources, and it should not lay its neck on the chopping block simply because it cannot be bothered, or is too racist or chauvinist, to use these resources to develop anti-fascist education. Anybody who argues that the fascists provide us with an 'opportunity' to fight their ideas, is an opportunist. For he or she is implicitly saying that they are not continually striving to create such opportunities themselves. In other words they normally capitulate to racism and chauvinism when the fascists are not around.

This is where we have to give the fascists their 'due'. For the fascists, unlike many sections of the left, are not economistic. They do not propose a struggle for this or that economic objective in isolation from politics. In fighting unemployment, they fight for racism. In fighting for protectionism, they fight for nationalism. In fighting against the militant trade unionists, they explain that parliament is no good for destroying the independence of the unions. In fighting for militarism, they explain that defence of 'family virtues' and the oppression of women are also vital. In short, the fascists are *highly political people*. The politics with which we counter them *must be as comprehensive as theirs*.

At the same time as practising no platform, it is necessary to bear in mind that it is not inevitable that the petty-bourgeoisie will be won to fascism. Nor is it at all inevitable that the fascists will pick up support among workers. But to stop the fascists picking up such support, it is not sufficient to place a barrier across their violent road. It is necessary to regroup their potential sources of support around the working class struggle.

To do this, the workers movement must have an adequate political line. This means an active fight against racism in the unions, the schools and universities (the NUS resolution correctly includes a detailed programme for this), the social services, housing etc. It means support for black struggles against discrimination, and for their struggle to defend themselves from the police and the fascists. It means active opposition to all racist laws. For without a vigorous fight on these issues, the more backward workers will never be won over to a policy of struggle against capital. At the same time however as arresting his or her drift towards the fascists, it is necessary to attack the economic problems at root - and this means adequate policies against redundancy, for the solution to the housing crisis, for the resistance against expenditure cuts in the social services, and so on. Like the fascists, we should not imagine that it is possible to divorce these two sides of the coin.

The workers movement must also be capable of winning over the petty-bourgeoisie. This can only be done by the working class having policies for the nationalisation of industry and the creation of a planned economy, with built-in guarantees for small shopkeepers and even small capital in order to allay their fears of being driven out of business without alternatives being provided by the workers movement. But most of all, the workers movement *must show itself as determined as the fascists are determined* to carry through their programme. Talk and no action will impress nobody. It is necessary for the working class to show in practice that it is prepared to adopt the road of struggle to overthrow capitalism and destroy its state power. If the workers movement merely cultivates its own garden in time of sharp crisis, the non-proletarian middle layers will only be repelled into the arms of fascists.

It will also be necessary for the left to take up a whole range of issues on which it has traditionally been weak. It is no use talking vaguely about 'struggle at the point of production' when what the working class housewife wants to know is how she can solve the problems associated with family life, which oppresses her - even though these questions do have a connection to 'production'. You cannot mobilise against the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, which is supported by the National Front, and which campaigns for a reversal of the abortion laws, unless you can explain why women should support the demands for abortion, contraception, nursery facilities and so on. It is also no use treating gay liberation as a 'side issue' when fascist groups have traditionally attracted gay people who, because of the absence of such a movement, could not 'come out' in straight society, yet who will be - as they were in Germany - persecuted and annihilated should the fascists ever come to power. The Gay Liberation Front has been in the forefront recently in mobilising against the fascists. It is also no use ignoring the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination when it comes to the National Front - for they will win over workers on the basis of anti-Irish racism.

### NUS DECISION - A BIG STEP FORWARD

The NUS decision to ban racists and fascists from the campuses is the biggest recent step forward which has taken place to combat the growing confidence of the fascists. It is vital that the battle for this resolution is won in the colleges, and the students should receive every support from the trade union movement. Students have pointed the way forward - and the universities are widely used by fascists and Monday Clubbers for a variety of technical purposes. Student unions can provide a big boost to the work of creating anti-fascist committees up and down the country which can carry the anti-fascist struggle forward.

In applying the 'no platform' position, neither students nor workers will be doing anything particularly new. It isn't necessary to talk about the sort of measures which workers organisations take against employers associations and bourgeois political parties when making socialist revolution, to establish this point. It is practiced every day. Trade unionists for example usually manage to deter their employers from attending their meetings; print workers have occasionally been able to interrupt the free flow of editorial slander against strikers by refusing to print certain editions of newspapers. When Mr Godber, former Minister of Agriculture, went to Birmingham to do a public relations job for Tory price policy, he was driven off the street by angry housewives. Hounslow Labour Council recently denied facilities to fascists and racists - its example should be followed everywhere. In the Thirties, the Mosleyites were stopped by street battles at Cable Street and elsewhere. All these actions have been against 'free speech' but they have proved absolutely necessary to defend the interests of the working class.

#### 4: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST MOSLEY

The violent tensions which marked the struggle against fascism in the streets of Britain in the 1930s still survive today in the memories of thousands. Yet the vital practical lessons flowing from these conflicts, increasingly important with the rise of organisations like the National Front, still remain unclear to many. It is necessary to examine this important period of working class history. The roots of British fascism stretch far back through a variety of strange conceptions and many weird groupings which sprang up in the early years of this century. The crazed fanatic Arnold Leese was a prominent figure, still acknowledged by some extreme rightists today as a pioneer. However, it was not until the mid-1920s that it first appeared as any kind of organised force, with the 'British Fascisti' and its offspring, who provided stewards for Tory rallies and strike-breakers in 1926. But at this stage they remained marginal to the armoury of the ruling class, the State relying instead on its police and judiciary, along with the trade union bureaucracy, to defeat the General Strike.

It was only with the onset of the spectacular economic crisis of 1931 that the picture began to change drastically. The depression destroyed the aspirations of the Ramsey MacDonald government, forcing a bitter debate within the ruling Labour Party. As overseas markets disintegrated, and unemployment reached 2½ million, the aristocratic Oswald Mosley abandoned high office and established the New Party to campaign for tight government controls over credit and currency.

Mosley's prestige amongst the bourgeois statesmen rapidly began to attract dissidents from the mainstream parties, who enthused over the solutions offered by his new organisation for capitalism in crisis. The project foundered, however, when the ruling class turned decisively towards a coalition ('national') government as a solution to its problems. Virtually deserted, Mosley then began to experiment with the 'corporate state' theories of continental fascism, and visited its adherents in Italy and Germany.

On his return, with simple ceremony, he inaugurated the British Union of Fascists on 1 October 1932 - his 'instrument of steel'. In a series of violent raids, the BUF rapidly wiped out its main rivals on the extreme right. Recruiting with speed it proclaimed its programme for 'modern' capitalist rule.

#### WHAT FASCISM OFFERED

A stream of publications now detailed Mosley's proposals for a rapid transition to managed capitalism - not unlike the 'New Deal' in the USA - via the introduction of one party dictatorship and state incorporation of the trade unions. His 'revolutionary creed' proposed a 'National Corporation' sub-divided into 23 industrial 'Corporations' with 'trade union sides' and a re-styled 'parliament' representing 23 'Occupations', under a retained Crown.<sup>1</sup> Only with this machinery could a massive public works scheme be initiated to absorb unemployment and impose controls over banking and foreign investment. As the BUF's paper "Blackshirt" declared: 'Fascism retains the benefits of privately controlled capital... though it lays down definite limits within which capitalism might operate.'

For the workers, guaranteed work and a National Health Service contained real attractions. These measures were presented as liberating the pent-up passions of 'Youth' and 'Science', so long frustrated by the 'Old Gang' of politicians.



As the black vans of the BUF took this message out into the streets, a traditionalist layer of the middle class together with sections of the ruling class proper began to prick up their ears. The black-shirted Mosleyites appeared to be ahead of the National Government - which despite protectionist tariffs and controlled currency relied primarily on 'natural' market forces to revive the economy - and offered a practical, though brutal, return to the glory of the Empire. Though the prospects for British capitalism were already improving again after the slump, memories of 1931 were sharp, unemployment was still high, and the proletariat were growing restive. In a gathering rush, money began to pour into the BUF's coffers from anxious industrialists.

Prominent figures in this period who (openly, or according to persistent rumour) provided finance for the Mosleyites included Sir William Morris (later Lord Nuffield), a powerful capitalist in motor manufacture; Sir A.V. Roe, aircraft industry; Lord Inchcape, shipping and insurance; Lord Rothermere, national newspapers; and the management of Courtaulds, the textiles firm. 3.

But another factor also demanded consideration. Each fascist rally, each demonstration, encountered opposition and protests from the militant left. A new BUF office in Walworth was picketed by angry workers for two weeks. The labour movement was slowly waking up to the Mosleyite threat. But it was to be very seriously impeded here by elements within its own ranks.

WORKING CLASS DISUNITY

An era of savage disunity between the organisations of the working class was only just ending. Hitler's advent to power in Germany in 1933 shook British social democracy, but throughout the period of Mosley's rise the Labour Party confined domestic anti-fascism to paper denunciations. Indeed, it advised workers to avoid clashes with the BUF, and pointed to the 'equal' dangers of communism. This seriously damaged the development of an action-based anti-fascist campaign, although a number of local Labour Parties took part in various mobilisations against Mosley at this time.

Further to the left, the Communist Party had been dreadfully hampered by the Moscow inspired ultra-leftism which had already wrecked class unity for their German comrades in the face of Hitlerism. Mosley and the 'social-fascist' Labour Party had been condemned simultaneously: 'The Communist Party leads the fight against Fascism in every country where Fascism has shown itself. Social Democracy surrenders to Fascism and passes over to Fascism....the Trades Union Congress Citrine-Cramp-Bevin line of co-operation with capitalism already contains in germ the whole line of Fascism ... the British Labour Party is already assisting the development of the British capitalist state in the direction of Fascism.' warned Palme-Duttes

RANK-AND-FILE

Both before and after the abandonment of this 'Third Period' line, following the seventh (and final) Congress of the Communist International in 1935, the CPGB perceived 'fascism in the anti-working class legislation of the British government as well as in the BUF, and often also in Trotskyism. These confusions however could not deter substantial activity by CP members in demonstrations specifically directed against Mosley.

By 1934, a Printing and Allied Trades Anti-Fascist Movement was functioning among print workers. Its objectives, where they concerned the Mosleyites, included 'work

in all sections of the printing trade by forming a group in each chapel for the purpose of building a mass anti-fascist movement ... organising in our Trade Unions for the following demands... to secure the closing down of Fascist barracks; to organise with a view to ensuring full support for all workers who refuse to print or handle any Fascist propaganda ... to co-operate with the continental workers in every way possible in their heroic struggle against fascist terror.<sup>15</sup>

#### ANTI-JEWISH CAMPAIGN

By mid-1934, the BUF had turned to fierce campaigning against the Jews in Britain. Their 'philosophical' paper later theorised: 'Talmudic materialism... in Karl Marx the son, the grandson, and the great-grandson of Rabbis... reveals itself by the hand of Jewish organisers and Tartar executioners in the Communist Revolution... Communism is Judaeo-Asiatic. Out of the East it comes, like a poisonous vapour.'<sup>16</sup> Several alarmed leaders of the Jewish bourgeois community arranged private talks with Mosley's deputy, Forgan, to try to avert the danger,<sup>7</sup> but the mass of Jewish workers increasingly threw their weight behind the anti-BUF mobilisations of their class.

Incidents multiplied as fascists and anti-fascists clashed with mounting ferocity. 10,000 marched against a huge BUF rally at Olympia on 7 June 1934. Blackshirt stewards tossed hecklers bodily down staircases, and injured workers were treated by anti-fascist doctors to avoid hospitalisation and police detection. Membership of Mosley's movement now ran to 20-30,000 on paper, with small 'Fascist Union of British Workers' established and links with overseas sympathisers through a 'New Empire Union.'

It is clear that by late 1935 the funds of the BUF had begun to sag, as the gently easing economic climate dissuaded individual capitalists from further large-scale investment in the movement. But the momentum of the fascist cause was too great to brake sharply. Attracting widespread acclaim, the blackshirts prepared for victory within the coming months.

#### IMPACT OF SPAIN

As the year 1936 dawned, black revolutionary CLR James warned in the paper of the Independent Labour Party (still at that time a sizeable organisation) that: 'The ruling classes, broadly speaking, are pro-fascist... rule they must, by fraud or through Parliament and the Press, or when that fails by force through fascism... and at the first signs of them we must apply the only remedy - organised bands of workers who will drive the fascists off the streets.'<sup>18</sup>

Events in Europe highlighted the danger. Nazi terror held sway in Austria and Germany. The Italian workers' organisations had long been smashed. In Paris, riots erupted as Fascists marched on the National Assembly. But the greatest blow was yet to come. The new line of the Communist International placed its hopes on 'Popular Front' alliances between workers and bourgeois parties to 'defend democracy.' Such a government now ruled in Spain. In July, sections of the army under Franco's command rose in arms with German and Italian aid and there too triggered a ferocious civil war to eventually bring fascism to power. The shock of these events reverberated through the British working class. It was in this atmosphere that Mosley launched his forces into the working class districts of London's East End, where a quarter of the population was Jewish. Claiming Keir-Hardie as the forerunner of the British Union of Fascists, fascist slogans declared: 'If you love your country, you are a National. If you love her people you are a Socialist. Be a National-Socialist!' Intensive recruitment drives rendered the East End the BUF's main base, with walls carrying the message, 'Parish Judah.' Street battles occurred almost daily.

As winter approached, Mosley announced a march across East London, from the City via Aldgate to Limehouse and Bethnal Green. Despite constant liberal protests, the Home Secretary declined to intervene. The date was set for 4 October 1936, a Sunday.

### CABLE STREET

Resistance on a massive scale to Mosley was anticipated, but needed organisation. The Labour Party and trade union leaders, however, told workers to stay away.<sup>9</sup> The Communist Party leadership also held back. It had projected a major youth rally for the same Sunday in Trafalgar Square, and refused to cancel this until 1 October. The 'Daily Worker' played down the issue until only days before the march, when the pressure had become irresistible. The 'official' CP record, written by Phil Piratin, virtually concedes this: 'What should be the character of the action against Mosley? It was felt that the workers would rally in huge numbers, and plans were made accordingly.' He continues, however: 'On that occasion, the leadership of the CP was undisputed.'<sup>10</sup> It is true, that once the CP had agreed on the need for action, their valuable printing and publicity facilities proved effective in building the counter-demonstration. But it is also a fact that the Independent Labour Party, which Piratin fails even to mention, played a leading role in calling for action. The ILP at that time stood to the left of the CP, opposing the inevitable concessions to bourgeois forces which accompanied the 'Popular Front' tactic. It was influenced by revolutionary agitation, and the Trotskyist movement, though small, was not without impact. Following a split in 1933, a minority had entered the ILP, and published a paper 'The Fight' as its marxist wing. The majority worked inside the Labour Party and Labour League of Youth through the paper 'Youth Militant'. These militants pressed for mass action to halt Mosley. Hundreds of Labour Party members and trade unionists responded to the call, and splits appeared in the East End CP's and YCL's. Jewish workers ignored the appeals of their bourgeois Board of Deputies to avoid conflicts. Dockworkers voted to participate. By mid-morning on the Sunday, 250,000 workers were on the streets.<sup>11</sup>

Some 7,000 police materialised to protect the fascists, whose coach windows were smashed by flying stones from the crowd. The police repeatedly charged to clear a way through, and shop fronts caved in as the workers clung to their positions, blocking Gardeners Corner. Trams abandoned by anti-fascist drivers reinforced the mass resistance.<sup>12</sup> As the battle spread beyond control, the police invaded Cable Street, only to encounter prepared barricades. Milk bottles and stones showered them, forcing several to actually surrender. The Spanish workers' slogan 'They Shall Not Pass' carried the day. With the fighting still raging, the police at last ordered the fascists to withdraw. The blackshirts retreated across the city, leaving the anti-fascists to celebrate for hours.

### AND AFTER

The Government said 'Blackshirt', had surrendered to Jewry.<sup>13</sup> Now the working class movement faced the crucial task of developing this victory to smash the fascists outright. But the Stalinists reverted to calls for a Popular Front, as opposed to organising the mobilised masses. A CP statement summarising the workers' triumph on the night of the battle ended 'Forward now to the united front and the People's Front all over Britain,' pointing to the forthcoming Labour Party conference.<sup>14</sup> Predictably, such hopes were dashed. Within ten days the 'Daily Worker' was reflecting how the Labour Conference 'rose again and again in applause at every reference to the victory of the London workers,' but 'the resolution carried only found the incident "deplorable".'<sup>15</sup>

In the face of social democratic inaction, the ILP drew a different moral: 'Unity of action must be maintained, and out of it must be built not only a movement of resistance to fascism, but a united militant working class which will go forward to win Workers' Power... In East and North London today, the workers are compelled seriously to consider the question of establishing an organisation to defend themselves.'<sup>16</sup> The ILP proposed an 'all-in conference' of workers' organisations to commence this task.

#### EAST END CONFERENCE

The need for organised and sustained mass action was apparent. Vengeance-seeking Mosleyites terrorised Jewish passers-by in Mile End Road, throwing a seven-year old girl through a shop window. Fifteen thousand workers marched the next Sunday under the slogan 'Fascism must be smashed!'. The ILP opened an anti-fascist HQ, held nightly meetings, and established a fund to combat Mosley, constantly urging the creation of a workers' defence force.

Eventually, an East End anti-fascist conference was held, organised by the Socialist League at Whitechapel. The official Labour Party leadership discouraged attendance, but 125 delegates came from union branches, local Labour Parties, Labour League of Youth branches, the ILP and some CP and Jewish community organisations. A committee was elected, and an agreement reached on unified stewarding for working class meetings and on an 'organised resistance' to the BUF, despite CP attempts to 'water down' these efforts.<sup>17</sup> But obviously these moves by themselves carried insufficient strength to take the working class on to a general offensive. This permitted the State to intervene.

#### FASCISM ABANDONED

The arousal of the masses had seriously worried the ruling class. The government therefore rushed in the Public Order Act, banning political uniforms and limiting the right to organise demonstrations, to the delight of the Labour Party opposition in parliament. This 'anti-fascist' legislation has since been generously applied to the socialist left on various occasions.

The ILP, for its part, warned that: 'Any such proposals must be resisted to the utmost... workers must not think that this will end the menace of fascism.'<sup>18</sup> This proved correct. The failure to build on the Cable Street victory allowed Mosley to fight on for months. Despite a financial crisis and splits inside the BUF, the fascists provoked another violent clash in Jamaica Road, South London in 1937; took 20% of the votes in some local elections; and as late as 1939 could gather 15,000 at major rallies.

The approach of war, however, with its consequent armaments drive, destroyed Mosley's dreams of a new depression that would instigate fascist rule; and the alignment of British imperialism against Hitler finally installed the BUF's leadership in Brixton prison under Defence Regulation 18B in May 1940. Capital had no further need of this 'instrument of steel'.

It is beyond doubt that the successes at Cable Street and elsewhere had dented and damaged the fascist movement. In clear contrast to the timidity of reformism, and the zig-zagging policies of Stalinism, revolutionaries and militants in the working class movement had fashioned unity in action by the masses on the streets. Their call for a standing workers' defence force, independent of the State, remains valid in our time whenever fascism threatens - and links the duty to smash fascism to its logical corollary in eliminating the root problem - capitalism itself.

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10. Our Flag Stays Red, by Phil Piratin, Thames Publications, 1948.
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