

Journal of Anti-Fascist Action (Incorporating Cable Street Beat)

FIGHTING TALK

The Battle of Cable Street— Learning The Lessons



FIGHTING FASCISM IN THE 90s

INTRODUCING FIGHTING TALK

Welcome to the first issue of *Fighting Talk*, the journal of Anti-Fascist Action and of Cable Street Beat. It will carry regular coverage of AFA's activities, and articles which set out our political agenda—which chart the growth of the fascist threat and set out the tasks necessary for the confrontation of that threat.

We make no apologies for the fact that our journal is not aimed at the curiosity of the armchair "intellectual" left, nor for the fact that on occasion we will highlight the shortcomings of those on the left who purport to share our goals. AFA has spent too long arguing that the growth of the far right across Europe and at home be taken seriously and combated as a necessity, for us to flinch from hammering home the facts as they present themselves to us today.

AFA sets itself two tasks: to combat the fascists both physically and ideologically. The work we undertake in both arenas will be reflected in the pages of *Fighting Talk*. AFA's job is to remove the influence of fascist organisations from working class areas (communities, work places, trade unions, football grounds, schools etc) and create a space for progressive ideas to gain a foothold. AFA unites a number of progressive working class organisations under its banner in a united front in which individuals and groups fight together against fascism. Within AFA, differences of strategy and tactics are argued out, and decisions reached democratically. Across London, AFA has pushed for, and received, support from the organised labour movement, including Tower Hamlets and Lambeth Trades Councils, NUS London, and a variety of trade union shops and branches. We believe that fascism exists to break the back of the organised working class, to prevent it settling its scores with a system which, increasingly, offers it no choice but to rot in poverty. As the fascists attempt to spread disunity within the working class, dividing it against itself on racial lines, one of our tasks must be to organise the class, on the estates, in the workplace, on the

terraces—to put down the fascists wherever they show their face.

With unemployment heading towards three million (according to the official-doctored-figures) and with government proposals for health and education leading to further job losses and worsening of service delivery to working class communities, small fascist organisations can seize on despair and discontent within the white working class and give it political direction, put a club in its fist.

Anyone (and there are sadly many on the left) who doubts the potential of fascist groups like the British National Party to root themselves on our estates need look no further for proof than the London borough of Tower Hamlets. The one in eight vote for the BNP in the August 1990 St. Peters Ward by-election represented some 25 per cent of the white vote in a community evenly divided racially. This shows that there are elements of the disillusioned white working class who see the BNP as a positive alternative.

Elsewhere in London the presence of the BNP locally has played its part in "inspiring" local racists to attack and even to murder black people, as in the case of Roland Adams and Orville Blair in Thamesmead.

The willingness of local councils—Labour, Tory and (in Tower Hamlets) Liberal Democrat—to exploit popular racism for their own ends fuels the spiral of racist attacks which pass almost without comment across London today. Groups like the BNP can organise the racists, give them an ideology and a degree of political legitimacy.

In East London, at least, AFA has been able to challenge the balance of power. The regular fascist paper sale in Brick Lane has been disrupted, fascist pubs have been picketed, "white" estates, long abandoned by the left, have been leafleted. The first steps have been taken to turn the tide away from the fascists, as AFA has demonstrated its ability to provide a political alternative, and meet the physical challenge the fascists offer.

But the fascist threat exists beyond the boundaries of East London. In the next general election the National Front threatens to contest 60 seats, including Eastbourne, Slough, Birmingham (Erdington and Hodge Hill). While targeting more "strategic" constituencies, the BNP

also intends to have an impact on the general election. In Edinburgh BNP leader John Tyndall will stand. Racist attacks are on the increase across Scotland. It is far from a coincidence that the BNP has devoted more resources to its campaigns in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

With the Tories playing the race card in the run-up to European unity in 1992, and the anti-immigrant backlash of the Gulf War and the "New World Order", the political climate is more and more favourable to the fascists. Every day black people are attacked in their homes, on the streets, at work. Mosques, community centres and synagogues are targeted for graffiti and arson attacks. Left wing meetings are disrupted. The fascists get away with much of this because there exists no coherent national organisation capable of opposing their growth. AFA sees the forging of such a network of anti-fascist groups as a necessity in the months ahead. Our London work can act as a marker for what's possible, and we can turn the fascists' slow retreat in East London into a national rout. The precondition for this, though, must be a break with the strategies of the past. Too often, militant anti-fascists have built alliances with all and sundry, including vicars and community policemen, only to tie their hands when the fascists show. Too often, hundreds of demonstrators, who outnumber the fascists on some occasions three to one, have patted themselves on the back when their "opposition" has amounted to nothing more than hollow chants from behind a wall of police crash barriers.

The fascists depend for their growth upon being able to create a climate of physical intimidation, of being the "hardest gang in town". The fascists deny the left credibility in the eyes of their supporters by being able to demonstrate that the left will always run, and leave the streets to them. AFA believes that, in building a militant anti-fascist organisation which roots itself in the workplace, on the streets and on the terraces, it is necessary to demolish the myth that the left won't stand its ground. In short, it is necessary to physically confront the fascists, and drive them off the streets. Unless we do so, the fascists' confidence will grow at our expense. There is a quote from Hitler that the left

always pays lip service to, but never learns from. For AFA it guides our strategy for building an anti-fascist movement capable of meeting the tasks it sets itself.

"Only one thing could have stopped our movement—if our adversaries had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed, with the utmost brutality, the nucleus of our new movement." (Adolf Hitler, 1933).

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LONDON ROUND-UP

South-East London

The main focus of AFA work in South-East London has been Thamesmead, which attracted nation-wide publicity earlier this year when two black people were stabbed to death within weeks of each other. After the first killing, of 15 year old Rolan Adams, local anger and the desire to do something to fight against racist attacks led to a campaign being set up in the Adams family's name.

Frequent meetings were held in the area, and initially it was mainly local black youth who came along. They were angry, and they wanted action. As people spoke from their personal experiences, it emerged that the level of racism, organised and spontaneous, in Thamesmead had reached alarming levels. The Police representatives who attended an early meeting were angrily ejected; no-one was in two minds about it—they were identified as part of the problem, not part of the solution. All looked set for a militant, action oriented campaign.

One local pub in particular, *The Wildfowler*, was identified as a meeting place for the racists and the fascists who inspire them. Immediately after the meeting in question, a posse went down to the pub to let the landlord know the score and to challenge what was described in the meeting as an unofficial colour bar. It was a successful first step in a campaign aimed to either get the fascists out of the pub or to close it down—as one AFA speaker put it, the pub should be a facility for everyone in Thamesmead, or it should be a facility for no-one.

However, before any of this could happen, some of the people from the meeting, including members of the Socialist Workers Party who had made rousing speeches about fighting racism "by any means necessary" set themselves the task of talking everyone out of the idea of going down to the pub at all. They lost the argument, thankfully, and had to trail along behind the rest of us, with their tails between their legs.

And despite the fact that there was no question of violence or disruption—it was a peaceful drink, the first time in a long while that blacks could have a peaceful drink in the pub—the police very soon appeared and emptied the pub of anti-racists.

Then, out on the street, they set out to provoke incidents with the local youth—they were itching for an excuse the wade in and make arrests.

The attitude of the police was at least predictable—after all, which anti-fascist or anti-racist these days really expects the police to assist them in confronting the problem? But the attitude of those left wingers who opposed going to the *Wildfowler* was harder to understand. It showed that they can be very good in meetings, but not so handy when it comes to putting words into action. Worse than that, it showed that some of these characters will even go to the length of actively dissuading others from taking action. This is worse than armchair socialism.

In a subsequent meeting, it was decided to organise a march in Rolan Adams' memory, from Thamesmead to the national headquarters of the Nazi British National Party in nearby Welling. The march was well attended—some reports said 1,500 were on it—and very militant. When we reached Welling, the anger erupted, and hundreds brought the march to a halt outside the BNP "bookshop." The Nazis wisely kept out of sight, and it looked for a moment that we'd all go home with a brick out of their wall as a memento, but the police and others came to the rescue. Another opportunity missed.

The BNP didn't actually kill Rolan Adams or Orville Blair, the second victim, but have been all too eager to exploit the situation that has arisen from it: twisting facts and encouraging escalation—all part of their strategy of trying to give legitimacy to racist violence.

They organised a violent attack on a meeting in central London organised by one of the groups involved in the Adams' campaign (National Black Caucus) where the main speaker was the radical preacher from the US, the Rev. Al Sharpton, who was also the main speaker after the Adams march. The fascists got away scot-free after the assault, in which they used tear-gas and coshes. In the *Evening Standard* there was a revealing picture which explained why no Nazis were arrested—it had two coppers helping away an innocent by-stander who was hurt in the fracas. Not so innocent, as it happened—he was a well known member of the BNP who was hurt as he fled into the road to get

away from those trying to defend the meeting.

The BNP then organised one of their "Rights for Whites" marches through Thamesmead on May 25. Even the most senior officer in the Metropolitan Police called the march a deliberate provocation, but his men and women on their day did their bit—including the customary baton-charge against the anti-racists to protect the BNP's 100-150 loyal defenders of the "master-race". They needed it too—as some of the aryan supermen wandering about trying to get into the area without police assistance will tell you.

AFA attended all the meetings of the campaign, and sat through all the arguments about tactics. Our stance was a clear one—we identified the *Wildfowler* as an immediate target for the campaign, arguing from our own experience that it was both possible and worthwhile to get the fascists shifted out of the pubs they use, thus disrupting their work and humiliating them into the bargain; as an intermediate target, AFA identified the BNP headquarters.

In addition, we argued for a real counter-demonstration against the BNP march, not just a token one. While there was plenty of empty talk in the meetings which served the purpose of impeding any concrete action, the decision was eventually taken to try to stop the BNP from entering Thamesmead. But on the day, this decision was simply ignored by the main campaign organisers, backed by the SWP, and they dutifully marched away from the fascists to the place where Rolan Adams was murdered. AFA does not wish to belittle the desire to commemorate Rolan; the point remains that this was not the time to do it. Why wait until the fascists were about to enter the area, and then march off to the one place where we knew for sure the BNP would not be?

This decision was not supported by all present—in addition to AFA and a substantial number of local youth, *Searchlight* supporters and even some individual members of the SWP refused to go along with the last minute about-face.

The issue facing anti-fascists in Thamesmead is a clear one: do we want a token campaign which expresses our opposition to the BNP and racism, but does not actually confront the fascists, or do we insist on concrete action against specific targets? When

AFA raised these issues it became clear where people within the campaign stood; and some were not above a bit of mud-slinging to hide their capitulation, either.

If something concrete is going to be done then it has to be done soon, before the rot of acceptance sets in, such as has happened to previous specifically local campaigns.

South London AFA Report

In recent months South London AFA has set itself the task of preventing the British National Party gaining a base in the borough of Southwark. Standing on a "Rights for Whites" platform, the BNP have contested a by-election in the Brunswick ward, with Steve Tyler as their far from charismatic candidate.

The ward encompasses a number of council estates which have been left to rot while Southwark's Labour council willingly served up the cuts in jobs and services demanded by their Tory paymasters in the City. The BNP's campaign originally targeted local housing officer (and suspended Lambeth councillor) Rachel Webb who, we were told, was more concerned with evicting "white residents for being racist" than evicting the drugged up and drunken squatters that infect our estate."

Southwark is one of London's poorest boroughs and is run by the Labour council on viciously anti-working class lines. On the estates the lousy conditions provide fertile ground for the BNP among discontented white residents. According to the fascists the area is a "dangerous multi-racial slum."

As well as distributing anti-fascist literature on the estates, AFA helped organise a rally on the estate which attracted upwards of 100 people. The rally was deliberately held on the night the BNP squads did their leafleting. The "hard men" decided that, rather than meet the challenge, they would skulk around at two in the morning to peddle their filth.

AFA speakers have addressed Nalگو and TGWU shop meetings and won the affiliation of Lambeth and Southwark trades councils, as part of our agenda of winning the organised working class away from complacency to active opposition to the fascist threat. The response from the left has been typically cynical. To

their credit, both Rachel Webb and a Southwark councillor, Ian Driver (who received a death threat for supporting the rally) addressed the rally. But the borough's other Labour councillors declined to give support, and the Socialist Workers' Party turned up on the night to give us a leaflet telling us all "not to get sidetracked by the BNP."

During the election campaign, the fascists didn't hold even one public meeting to promote Steve Tyler's claim to political fame. However, they did hold a "secret" rally on the Elmington estate which wrong-footed local anti-fascists simply because it was never publicised; but when AFA held a meeting of over 120 people the following week, the BNP, despite a number of threats, again failed to put in an appearance.

On the night of the vote count, over a hundred anti-fascists rallied outside the Town Hall, while the BNP hid inside from early in the evening. (No thanks are due, however, to those members of the SWP and Revolutionary Communist Group who disappeared at 10.30pm, half an hour before closing time and half an hour before the BNP left the hall!)

When Tyler and his squad did finally show, it was difficult to see them, obscured as they were by the police escort they evidently decided was necessary to protect their "rights as whites" from the "dangerous multi-racial slum dwellers" who had come to cast their votes on as many fascist skulls as presented themselves.

In the event, Tyler got 132 votes, which indicates that Labour's betrayals of working class people in Southwark have driven a small number to look to the BNP for answers.

At present the BNP are only confident enough to leaflet the estate after midnight, or en masse. Rather than allow their confidence to grow, we should organise to smash their paper sales and kick them off the streets once and for all.

EAST LONDON

The East End of London is a critically important area in the struggle against fascism in London and in Britain as a whole. It is the area which the Nazi British National Party has singled out as a national priority. It is a poor area, with bad housing conditions, high unemployment and large numbers of homeless

people. The BNP aims to divert the justified anger of the East End's overwhelmingly working class population away from the real causes of the problems they face down into the blind alley of racial confrontation. They participate in and encourage race attacks, and carry out a sustained propaganda offensive aimed at organising a race war to head off the class war.

Central to all their efforts is the weekly paper sale at Brick Lane market in Bethnal Green. Each Sunday, they stand there alongside their fellow nazis of the National Front (Flag group) at the very popular market in the heart of the East End's Bengali community. It is a provocation, of course, but it is much more than that: it is their chance to meet contacts and build their organisation. After the sale, they nip off to the pub to firm up their contacts and plan their attacks.

So the two key targets of AFA work in the area are the paper sale itself, and the pubs used by the fascists. In our pamphlet *Introduction to London AFA* (published by us earlier this year, and available from AFA BM Box 1734, London WC1N 3XX, price £1 plus postage) we set out details of how our campaign has built up. Since then, following a very successful demonstration against the fascist paper sale and a mass picket of *The Sun* public house on Bethnal Green Road in March, East London AFA stepped up the pressure with leafleting campaigns and "flash" pickets called at short notice. Very soon the landlord recognised that serving beer and providing facilities to nazis and convicted fire bombers and race attackers was not such a good idea. After the fascists were unceremoniously pushed out of this watering hole, they hid for a while in the comparative safety of another pub in Bethnal Green Road—the Shakespeare, right next to Bethnal Green police station and the plod's own favourite oasis. Predictably, their stay there was not a long one; now they've moved over the road to the Ship, where the AFA campaign is once again on their tail.

The campaign against the paper sale is necessarily a long-term one. It is the fascists' only remaining regular sale in London, and one which they will not give up easily. A variety of tactics will be needed before they are shifted. One tactic we've used so far has been to challenge them



BNP fuhrer John Tyndall (centre) and mad bomber Tony Lecomber (right) on one of their "Rights for whites" marches — which went through London's East End in 1990.

by taking over their patch. We arrive at Brick Lane before them and defend ourselves against the inevitable violent attack they launch against us aimed—without success—at regaining their sales pitch and their pride. Other tactics have been to mobilise far larger numbers in peaceful and vocal demonstrations. Another demonstration along these lines is planned for October.

AFA takes its commitment to both ideological and political confrontation of the fascists very seriously. Our demonstrations, whether aimed at direct confrontation or at peaceful protest, are always well stewarded against potential fascist counter-attacks. The same goes for our leafleting and other activities, like our participation in the East End Yesterdays festival (see the article on Cable Street for details). We have never been chased off, nor had to abandon any of our activities because of physical threats from the fascists. The opposition does not have such a good track record, we are glad to say!

Currently, we are involved in raising the public profile of AFA in what are quite new ways for us. Not only are we preparing a permanent exhibition detailing the history of anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles in the East End to go round schools, libraries and other places (an off-shoot of our participation in East End Yesterdays) but we are also actively reclaiming our history—on October 12 we are holding a series of events, including a rally with veteran anti-fascists from the area, to commemorate to 55th anniversary of Cable Street. And on September 8th, AFA and Cable Street Beat are organising a major anti-racist carnival with nationally known bands in Hackney Downs Park. East London AFA has

established itself as a serious force, carrying out in practice its declared aim of challenging the fascists and creating the space for a progressive alternative. There is a phenomenal amount of work still to be done, but we have begun to challenge what was an accepted balance of forces, and have visibly dented the fascists' confidence. We are setting the agenda rather than simply responding to the fascists' initiatives, as we said we would.

In the past period, East London AFA has grown significantly and has expanded its contacts with the labour movement, including the local trades councils. Particularly with the general election which is coming up, when the fascists will step up their work in the East End, we have to rise to the occasion, and we need the support of all genuine anti-fascists in the area. So what are you waiting for—join us now!

ORGANISING ANTI-FASCISM IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Following a highly successful mobilisation against a National Front local election meeting in the Hertfordshire area as a result of which the fascists were forced into a precipitate and humiliating retreat, Red Action members in Hatfield decided that it was high time that anti-fascist activity in the region was co-ordinated in the form of a dedicated anti-fascist organisation.

The initial meeting was enthusiastically attended by an excellent turnout of anti-fascists from around the county—too many, in fact, for the room that we had booked. In addition to unattached individuals, representatives from the SWP, Militant, Direct Action Movement, and a hitherto little recognised local organisation, AGM (Asian Gang Members), plus a healthy

number of Red Action members already linked with London AFA participated.

It was first of all agreed that the correct strategy in opposing racist activities was to be based upon both ideological and physical confrontation.

Following the arrest of a number of anti-fascists during the disruption of the National Front's election campaign in Hemel Hempstead, a defence campaign was formed. Of the four defendants charged, one was acquitted of all charges and the other three of the main charges of assault and assault on the police. The magistrates felt it necessary, in order to uphold the majesty of the law, to find them guilty of the remaining charges of threatening behaviour.

Incidentally, our style of electioneering evidently impressed the local electorate far more than the campaigning of the fascists-their candidate received 18 votes, presumably including his own.

In Hatfield, we have already held a widely publicised social in the name of Anti-Fascist Action to which a number of local bands donated their services. Despite blood-curdling threats from the fascists to disrupt the event on the night, not a mouse squeaked. The gig attracted a large number of people from all over the area and generated a useful amount of money and publicity as well as being a highly enjoyable occasion in its own right.

In each of the meetings so far, emphasis has been laid upon the necessity of forming local anti-fascist branches in each town or area so that any interventions as they became necessary, could be conducted with appropriate local knowledge and agreement. Given the spread of towns and areas represented, local reports were given from each, allowing an insight into the regional situation as a whole regarding racist activities and particularly the state of fascist organisations.

It became clear that large numbers of racist activities, from standard outbreaks of fascist stickers to serious attacks, were taking place. In Hatfield itself one Asian man had been attacked twice by the same people-the second time resulting in injuries that put him in a coma for a week. It was clear that the perpetrators in this instance acted from generalised racism rather than specific ideological commitment to any fascist groups. Action was

taken that hopefully will have ensured that the problem, at least with these individuals, does not recur.

The fascists appear to have an organised presence in only one town in the immediate area with smaller, less visible branches elsewhere. A strategy has been evolved which will become apparent to these Fronters in due course-watch this channel.

Nonetheless a disturbing but predictable trend has recently become evident in a number of systematic attacks upon left paper sellers in a neighbouring area. This appears to fit in with developments on a national scale. Having for so long been left to their own devices, the fascists have reorganised to the point where left-wing ostriches with their heads in the sand are having their arses kicked. Expect a reorientation of attitudes shortly.

There exists a whole strata of left orthodoxy that describes the present level of fascist activity, in the words of a recent writer in *Socialist Worker* as consisting of "no more than a hard core of extremely isolated fanatics" with a corresponding danger of revolutionaries "becoming obsessed with pointless fascist hunting." It is open to debate whether those in black or asian communities actually on the receiving end of the thuggery dished out by "extremely isolated" bands of racists would agree that the effort involved in eliminating them was wasted. They may even feel, in such places as Tower Hamlets or Bethnal Green, that it is they, not the fascists, who are isolated. What cannot be denied is that years of ignoring fascists selling their papers at the other end of the street ("I see no fascists") and announcing that not enough black or asian people are being attacked or living in terror for the left to organise against it ("the fascists are isolated") have produced their predictable consequences. The fascists will never be isolated where they are seen to be unopposed-on the contrary, they create a climate and a zone where casual and opportunistic racism becomes acceptable and establishes itself.

One fine instance of this process has emerged through contacts that have been made with a groups of anti-fascists in an area immediately outside our region, in the Milton Keynes area. This followed a fascist organised attack on three asian workers leaving their workplace. An axe

was one of the weapons used.

In themselves, these contacts are a very encouraging sign and perhaps the beginning of real inter-regional co-operation. However, it unfortunately appears to be the case that a group of fascists belonging to the BNP have been allowed to establish a regular presence in the town. Local socialists allowed the situation to develop to the point where a BNP paper sale complete with flourished of the Union Jack has been held in the town centre for over a year. BNP posters and stickers are plastered everywhere, with until recently, little response.

Local BNPs will have noticed Red Action and AFA stickers now deface their work. A Herts AFA delegation was sent to join local anti-fascists in a takeover of the BNP pitch on a recent Saturday-the BNP laid low. However, the following week it was reported that they had returned in some numbers, preventing local anti-fascists from holding their own counter-demonstration. This is clearly an unsatisfactory state of affairs and Herts AFA have pledged their continued support. It is however vital that a strong, clear-minded and committed group of local anti-fascists is established in the MK area in order to maintain the gains that a co-ordinated regional campaign is capable of winning.

AFA's position is that effective action against the fascists can only take place through the development of a national network of AFA branches in which all anti-fascists are democratically represented and develop collective strategies. And no, we do not think that it is a good idea to wait until the fascists are a bit better organised.

Fascist and anti-fascist activity in Manchester

The problem for fascist organisations in Manchester is that they have no real influence in Manchester itself. About ten years ago they were kicked off the streets of the city, and have never really returned. They don't sell their papers openly and they don't hold public meetings. Instead their activities and membership are largely confined to towns on the outskirts of the city such as Rochdale, Bolton and Wigan.

Obviously they would like to have a greater presence in the

city, but whenever they try to organise in Manchester itself, things seem to go badly for them.

Manchester BNP has suffered several set-backs over the past year. Firstly their attempt to organise a rally in Blackburn ended in disaster when they found they couldn't attract sufficient local support, and had to cancel the event. The few unwitting fascists who did turn up found themselves unwillingly involved in some impromptu "street theatre" and had to be escorted out of town by the local constabulary.

The prestigious "Friends of Oswald Mosley" meeting, which was organised by the local branch, and for which they were to provide stewards, was cancelled when the true nature of the event was revealed to the owners of the hotel in which the meeting was to be held.

This was followed a couple of weeks later by another 'secret' meeting ending in chaos, when the management of Parkers Hotel in the city refused entry to John Tyndall and his handful of followers. This led to the Führer addressing the masses on a patch of waste ground behind a railway station. Unfortunately for the dedicated few, some of the waste land ended up on them!

In November, a clash between anti-fascists and fascists outside Mother Macs, a pub in the city centre, left two fascists needing hospital treatment. The pub had been used by the BNP for branch meetings and had been under surveillance for some time. The irony was that on several occasions they could be heard boasting that the 'reds' would never suspect them to be holding meetings in a pub managed by an Irish landlord! It must be stated that the landlord was unaware of their presence in his pub.

Although collections were taken up for Loyalist prisoners at these meetings, they weren't responded to with much enthusiasm by these members of the master race-they reckoned that the presence of blacks in Liverpool's Orange Lodges meant they weren't "racially pure". The rest of this branch's activities include the usual range of spray-painting and fly-posting. (Further details can be found in *Searchlight* 186 and local listings magazine *City Life*).

The only sign of life from the National Front recently was an attempt to hold a meeting in Manchester Town Hall. When they were denied this facility, Ian

Anderson, Chair of the NF, announced that they would instead rally on the steps of the town hall. AFA announced that it would rally at the same spot an hour before the fascists, but unfortunately both Militant and the SWP decided for whatever reason that they would both be holding their own demonstrations.

This of course was only to be expected from these organisations, but it did allow a 30 to 40-strong AFA stewards group to move around the city centre free from the attentions of the police. The stewards group was able to deter several fascists from attending the meeting, when they took over the NF's redirection point at Victoria Station. The meeting eventually went ahead in a hotel in Wythenshawe (about six miles from the city centre).

Elsewhere on the right, a group calling itself the "Independent White Party" stood in the recent local elections in Bury and gained a miserly 55 votes. Apart from this the only sign of any other group active in the area is the odd "League of St. George" and "English Solidarity" sticker.

The one occasion a year that does bring the fascists out into the open is the Manchester Martyrs' Commemoration, which until recently brought out considerable opposition from both the fascists and the Loyalists. However, the decline of the Commemoration has mirrored the decline of the opposition. The march known as 'Ascot' to local fascists can still be relied on to attract the attention of a few moronic die-hards.

The problem for anti-fascists in Manchester is the lack of any co-ordination between the various anti-fascist groups, and the lack of any coherent strategy to deal with the fascists in the areas where they are strongest. The problem at present is not massive, it's a small, but growing problem. While the recent BNP candidate in Rochdale only managed 3.98 per cent of the vote in the local elections in May, this in fact represented a considerable step forward for the recently established branch. It is a problem that should be dealt with sooner rather than later. To this end a meeting will be called in September to map out a strategy to deal with this problem. All anti-fascists will be invited.

D. Strachan (Manchester AFA)

THE LAUNCHING OF AFA IN DUBLIN

Having witnessed an increase in fascist activities in the last few years, a group of independent socialists and members of Red Action decided to come together and form an anti-fascist organisation in Dublin. Having previously opposed fascism/racism in an individual capacity, we now went about erasing these scum in an organised and more effective manner.

To date, we have been relatively successful. Many of our members had previously confronted the fascists whenever they came across them but now, with an organisation behind us, we set about finding the Nazis and physically forcing them from our streets.

At the same time, we have set about the task of informing people of the threat the fascists pose, even though at present they are small in number and badly organised. We have recently begun a series of anti-fascist gigs, supported by an intensive poster and sticker campaign around the city.

A major success for us was the protests we launched against a visit to Ireland by Le Pen, the French Nazi leader. This visit gave us the chance to publicly highlight the opposition to fascism in Ireland. The organised pickets had a good effect on the media covering the visit, as did our attempt to disrupt Le Pen's own press conference, when our supporters almost got into the meeting.

For the Le Pen protests we contacted other groups such as the travellers, gays, Muslims, Jews etc, in the hope that they would also mobilise forces. Some of these groups did do this, but the response of the others was disappointing.

The fascists in Dublin rely heavily on imported hate material or poor quality copies of their own rubbish. At present they are small in number but retain links with English Nazis, and if we are not careful they could become a serious threat.

We have the will to resist fascism in Dublin. What we need now is more people—individuals and groups—to join us in the fight against fascism and to build Dublin AFA.



Glasgow's Aryan supremacists with their police guardians.

FIGHTING FASCISM IN SCOTLAND

Anti-Fascist Action was formed in Scotland as a direct response to the growth of the British National Party. Whereas in the past fascist groups found some difficulty in attempting to build a base in Scotland, the BNP have oriented almost exclusively towards young Glasgow Rangers fans, with paper sales at Ibrox (Rangers' ground), and by identifying themselves as supporters of Ulster Loyalist groups.

Their confidence that they can develop their forces north of the border is demonstrated by the fact that would-be Führer John Tyndall intends to stand in Edinburgh in the next general election.

There have been large mobilisations against the fascists on every occasion when they have tried to rally. In Edinburgh, Dundee and Glasgow, they have had their activities severely disrupted by violent demonstrations against them.

Paradoxically, the natural instincts of those young working class people who recognise that the BNP has to be trounced has led to a debate over the best means to defeat them.

Some groups, like the Socialist Workers Party, argue that the fascists are insignificant and that there is no need for a militant anti-fascist group like AFA at the moment. Our answer to this is simple—if the fascists are as small and insignificant as the SWP believe then surely it would be a simple matter for the left to smash them now rather than awaiting a "significant" upsurge in support for them. The truth of course is that the SWP have no interest in anything other than building their own party, which relies almost exclusively on students rather than on working class people on the housing estates. Rather than admit that their members

basically aren't up to it, they construct a cock and bull story that there are hardly any fascists anyway!

The result for them last February was that the BNP attacked one of their public meetings and hospitalised one of their members. Not one single word about this attack ever appeared in any of the SWP's publications, even after four BNP members were jailed for the attack!

Militant, on the other hand, have been prepared to confront the fascists where necessary, but seem reluctant to involve themselves in a broader, non-sectarian anti-fascist organisation like AFA. Instead, they continue to use their front organisation, the Youth Rights Campaign, and their newspaper aimed at Black and Asian youth, *Panther*, essentially to build their own organisation. At the end of the day, this type of sectarianism and opportunism by the likes of *Militant* and the SWP only plays into the hands of the enemy.

Anti-Fascist Action meanwhile continues to extend its influence, having already held a Cable Street Beat gig which attracted 150 people and a public meeting in Dennistoun (an area targeted by the BNP) which was attended by 60. In addition, a public meeting is to be held in Pollockshields in August and further Cable Street events are planned for September.

Groups which support the Glasgow branch of AFA include Red Action, Class War, Direct Action Movement, Workers Party Scotland, Scottish Anti-Racist Movement and the Republican Bands Alliance.

Future activities also include an Anti-Fascist Football Action Campaign against the BNP as Scottish football grounds encouraging fans to give the Nazis a wide berth if they show up and to physically remove them from the terraces.

TURNING THE TIDE

FIGHTING TALK MAGAZINE

The Lessons of Cable Street

This October marks the 55th anniversary of the most famous street fight in the history of the anti-fascist struggle in Britain—the Battle of Cable Street. Everyone, it seems, from liberals and Labour MPs through to the far left, recognises the importance of the victory at Cable Street in 1936.

The Communist Party, who did the bulk of the organising, see it as a victorious example of their policy of the popular front in action. Dissident communists like Joe Jacobs, who was expelled from the CP for his more confrontational approach to fascism, see things differently, and emphasise the fact that the CP leadership initially had opposed the call for a mass mobilisation against the planned British Union of Fascists march through the East End on October 4.

The dispute is not just between different revolutionary tendencies, of course: there are plenty of less radical voices who play down the role of the organised far left in making sure the fascists did not pass on that day.

Sir Oswald Mosley formed his British Union of Fascists in 1932. The BUF advocated the abolition of democratic government, political parties, strikes and trade unions. From 1935, inspired by Hitler, he put increasing emphasis on anti-semitism.

Like today, Britain was deep in recession. Like today, East London was among the most deprived areas in the country. Like today, fascism took advantage of hardships among the working class population to stir up racial rivalries. They blamed unemployment on Jewish workers, low wages on Jewish employers, high rents on Jewish landlords. Like today, these arguments were powerfully backed by elements of the popular press — *The Daily Mail* and the *Evening News* supported Mosley. Like today, the racist propaganda was baseless.

Veteran of the battle of Cable Street and member of the CP, Solly Kaye, describes the conditions he and other Jews lived in at the time: "You had massive unemployment, immense poverty, social services nowhere near what they are today, terrible slums. I lived in a street where 17 people lived in one little block of three flats with one outside toilet... The fascists could involve



Police waded in to make way for the fascists — to no avail.

people on the basis of envy, fear ... by saying 'OVER THERE the Jews, they've got your houses, OVER THERE the Jews they've got your jobs.' Even though we were living in bloody poverty with bugs crawling all over us in the night."

For Mosley the Battle of Cable Street was a physical defeat and a propaganda disaster from which he would never recover. Within a year he had lost much of his following, and dismissed all his senior staff for lack of funds. BUF membership declined from about 250,000 in 1935 to just 9,000 in 1940. And at the outbreak of world war two, Mosley and 800 other Hitler supporting BUF members were arrested under defence regulations.

But it wasn't the end of fascism in East London. Just one week after the Battle of Cable Street, as a 'victory' march wound through the East End, fascist thugs were back — throwing Jewish shop-keepers through windows, smashing and looting their shops. And in the East End of London today, fascists are once again stepping up their activities—the British National Party have made their work there a national priority. They see the East End as their natural territory, and it is true that Bethnal Green and Shoreditch have been important bases for them in the 30s and 70s. And in a recent local council election in Bethnal Green, the BNP polled 12 per cent; since the ward is evenly split between white and Asian voters, this translates into a vote of nearly one-in-four of the white community.

But the East End is not—nor was

it ever—"their" patch. It is, and always has been, an overwhelmingly working class area. It is the only part of England ever to have returned an MP on a straight Communist ticket (in 1945)—and it is no coincidence that he was Phil Piratin, one of the key CP organisers in the prewar period and a veteran of the Battle of Cable Street. Before that, in the 1920s, Bethnal Green had a Labour-Communist Mayor. The East End is *our* area, not theirs. We have a history of left wing organisation, of struggle against fascism, and of victory. For the fascists, the history of the East End is a history of defeats. That is the first lesson for us as we organise to make sure that the 90s go down in history as another decade of defeat for the fascists.

But there are many other lessons to be drawn from this period, lessons about tactics and strategy as well as about the possibility of victory.

It is a fact that the leaders of the CP, who had planned a mass rally in central London in support of the Republican government in Spain, were reluctant to allow Mosley's decision to march through the East End to disrupt what was for them a nationally and internationally important event. Local CP members saw it very differently, and argued their case strongly enough for the party to change its plans and put resources into building a massive counter to the BUF.

The CP was split over how to oppose and fight fascism, but it was serious about doing so. And it certainly had no pacifist illusions about defeating fascism without

physical confrontation.

The divisions within the CP at the time were about how best to do this, not about whether or not it should be done. The CP and other anti-fascists disrupted BUF events, most notably at Earl's Court where the level of violence against anti-fascists was condemned widely even in the capitalist press. Some, like Joe Jacobs, argued for a line rather similar to the one pursued by the German Communist Party under von Neumann—namely hit the fascist whenever you find them. Others, like Phil Piratin, put the emphasis more on mass mobilisation. If these themes seem familiar to us today, it is for a good reason—the same arguments sprang up again in the 1970s and 1980s, and are with us even now.

As in the past, the polarisation between the advocates of these tactics is a false one. No-one, least of all Joe Jacobs, would argue that a march on the scale of October 4 1936 could have been stopped by a small squad of communist heavies. And no-one, least of all Piratin, could have argued that mass mobilisation could be sustained 24 hours a day. In between the mass demonstrations, fascist gangs still have to be opposed, and on a necessarily smaller scale. To fight fascism, we need a flexible approach which combines a variety of tactics, but which is based on the recognition that to politically confront fascism means, inevitably, that there will be physical confrontation.

Only someone who is willfully politically dishonest—and there has been no shortage of those through the years—could describe the attempt to organise self-defence and anti-fascist offence as "squadism." Perhaps the attempts through the years to organise workers' defence squads to defend demonstrations and picket lines were "squadism" too?

If Cable Street tells us anything, it is that the better organised this violence is, the more effective it will be. Fascists today must learn what their forerunners in the BUF learned in 1936—there is no easy target for their thugs, and there is a price to pay for advocating race hate. Every time they attack and get away with it, the fascists grow stronger; every time they are chased off or get one of their events disrupted, it sets them back.

This point is so self-evident that should not need reiterating

55 years after Cable Street. But unfortunately, there are plenty who hide behind the slogan of "mass actions" to justify doing nothing to actually confront the fascists now, and who accuse those who take a more serious approach to the tasks at hand as "squadist." Worse than that, as we have seen at Thamesmead and on other occasions, so-called revolutionaries have been only too happy to march away from any kind of confrontation with the fascists—be it political or physical or both—thus effectively giving these thugs a free hand. If we say there should be no platform for fascists, we should take the necessary steps to prevent them having a platform whenever we can.

This leads to another central lesson of Cable Street. The majority of people, when they think of the Battle, imagine that it was a fight between anti-fascists and fascists, or even between the CP and the BUF. This was not at all the case. It was a fight between the anti-fascists and the police for the most part.

On today's demonstrations it is common to hear the chant "The police protect the fascists." It's true, of course, and never was it truer than at Cable Street. To fight fascism, then as now, means confrontation not just with the fascists themselves, but with the police. It is no accident that militant anti-fascists are such prominent targets for police repression. But it is not enough to decry this fact; we want action as well as propaganda. If the police protect the fascists, and if the police attack anti-fascists whenever they can, we must respond with our own tactics to counter them.

Already, many lessons have been learned on this score from what happened during the miners' and the printworkers' strikes through to the poll tax struggle. Legal observers on demonstrations have helped prevent the police from intimidating of demonstrators, and have assisted in uncovering illegal police tactics. This is an area of work that AFA is expanding, in alliance with others with more experience. Right now, it is an extremely important tactic.

But it is not the only tactic. The police use "snatch-squads" to pull out individuals on demonstrations. They use provocateurs. Phones get tapped. Each tactic, each example of repression demands specific

counter-tactics. At Cable Street, they fought off the police and were not afraid to be arrested in the process. And they succeeded. We have to do the same.

In recent months, the fascists have stepped up their attacks—both against black people and other racial groups and against left wing meetings and paper sales. They feel increasingly confident in doing so. We have no choice but to stop them.

As Cable Street veteran Solly Kaye observes, there is no excuse for complacency in the fight against fascism: "We don't want to overestimate but there is a danger that people will underestimate. In spite of Cable Street, in spite of the war, in spite of the suffering caused to millions by fascism, racism exists and is widespread in our society today ... I experienced it in the 30's and I tell you, it's worse today."

Solly and his generation fought

back, organised themselves, and defeated fascism. They did what was necessary—they fought on all fronts. We need to do the same today. There is a place in the anti-fascist struggle for everyone who accepts that fascism needs to be defeated; and there is a place in AFA for anyone who recognises that we need to organise this political—and physical—confrontation. In short, for anyone who recognises that we have to fight to win.

EAST END YESTERDAYS

In the first week of July East London AFA participated in the *East End Yesterdays* festival in Tower Hamlets. The festival aimed to highlight the multi-racial history of the East End, and included exhibits about family life on the Isle of Dogs, fish curing in the East End, the local Jewish refuge, and the Bengali seamen in the East End. It also emphasised the struggles against racism and fascism, with the participation of International Brigade and Battle of Cable Street veterans from the area.

AFA's contribution was two-fold, consisting of a six panel exhibit about the history of the fight against fascism in the East End, and a presentation with speakers on a day entitled *Struggle and Conflict in the East End*. The panel exhibit showed the circumstances in the 30's which led to the Battle of Cable Street. It included examples of the poor housing conditions and high unemployment locally, and charted the rise of fascism in Europe.

The exhibition linked the struggles of the past with those of today, focusing on the British National Party, which has declared the East End an area of national priority.

The BNP are aiming at disaffected and racist elements within the local white community. Our exhibition

emphasised that today as in the past the local community must unite in opposition to the fascists, who represent a threat to all workers, black and white. We must stop them from gaining a toehold in this solidly working class area.

The day on *Struggle and Conflict* was divided into two sessions, the morning aimed at schools and the afternoon open to pensioner groups and the general public. The morning session involved three speakers: a Cable Street and International Brigade veteran, Charlie Goodman; a Bengali local councillor, Jalal Uddin; and a young Bengali who was born and grew up in the area. All three drew on their own experiences to point to ways of combatting racism and fascism.

The session was divided into two hour-long presentations aimed at the specific needs of the two local schools which had sent their pupils to take part.

One sent a mixed class of 13-14 year olds. The speakers argued that the pupils had to stand up for themselves and oppose the racists and fascists.

However the other presentation was the more interesting as the class of 14-15 year olds included some who had racist tendencies. In fact one lad from the class noticed himself in some of the photos of the local *Rights for Whites*

marches, and later stated he agreed with the BNP's policies.

In the heated discussion that followed, the speakers put their points across forcefully. While this did not necessarily have an immediate effect on his support for the BNP, he certainly left the meeting with a clear understanding of AFA's policies.

The day concluded with an evening walk along route of the Battle of Cable Street, introduced by local councillor Deren Gadd. Finally, we held a brief slide show and discussion about the historical implications of Cable Street for today's fight against fascism.

This exhibition added a new dimension to AFA's campaign in the East End of London. It also helped to further publicise AFA's aims and to build up new contacts in the area. We plan to use the material from the exhibition to create a permanent display which can be taken round to schools, libraries and community centres, and we will be putting it on show at the anti-racist carnival we are organising in East London in September. AFA would like to thank the Community Arts Office in Oxford House, where the exhibition was held, the speakers, Deren Gadd and everyone else who contributed

Mosley and Co. strut their stuff.

Calling All Veterans

AFA wants to contact Cable Street, International Brigade and other Anti-Fascist veterans for interviews about their past struggles and experiences in the movement. Write to: AFA, BM 1734, London WC1N 3XX.

Cable Street veteran Charlie Goodman addressing schoolchildren at the afternoon session.



THE BATTLE OF CABLE STREET

The BUF's 4 October march was intended to capitalise on escalating racial intimidation and violence in the East End. The fascists were to assemble at Royal Mint Street at 2.30pm and march East at 3.00pm, to a meeting at Limehouse and a rally in Victoria Park Square.

The Home Secretary was petitioned to ban the march. He would not. So a call was issued to block the streets. In a massive collaborative effort to mobilise resistance, a million leaflets were issued, pounds of chalk and gallons of whitewash were used to cover walls and paving with slogans: "All out on 4 October," "The shall not pass." On the day, a quarter of a million took part.

By 2.00pm on 4 October, vast crowds of anti-fascists were assembled at four different locations: Leman Street, Gardiner's Corner, Cable Street and St. George's Street. They were blocking all possible routes the fascists might take. At 2.30pm 3,000 fascists assembled at Royal Mint Street, protected by 5,000 police. With baton charges the police proceeded to clear Royal Mint Street of anti-fascists. The march moved off.

The police tried to carve a way up Leman Street, but the people stood their ground, helped by an

anti-fascist tram driver who'd abandoned his vehicle, blocking the way into Commercial Road. Messenger boys on bicycles spread the word that the march would be re-routed.

Three barricades were rapidly thrown up across Cable Street. Paving stones were torn up, a lorry, donated for the purpose, was overturned. The police managed to dismantle one barricade. Hand to hand fighting went on for several hours. Every time the crowd was scattered it re-formed. Children's marbles were thrown into the road to keep mounted police back. Elderly residents threw down milk bottles and bags of soot from upper floors. The resistance was so strong that the police were forced to abandon their efforts.

As a veteran of the battle, Yvonne Kapp recalls: "Short of murder and mayhem, no force could have broken up that tight-packed, solid press of people standing there, a human barricade, in stoic and apparently immovable strength."

Mosley, who had arrived late at Royal Mint Street, was told by the Chief Commissioner of London Police that the march through East London must be abandoned. They did not pass.



TRAGEDY AND FARCE

FASCISM IN FRANCE

Although the beginnings of modern fascism are usually traced to Mussolini's Italy, the roots of much fascist ideology are more deeply embedded in France than anywhere else. Indeed, for the last decade, France has witnessed the growth of the largest, most powerful and best-organised fascist tendency in Europe - the Front National.

It would be absurd to think that fascism in France today existed merely for historical reasons, rather than as a result of contemporary social conflicts. Nevertheless, French fascism today is able to draw on traditions which help to give it a stronger appeal to the popular imagination than may be the case elsewhere.

Between The Revolution of 1789 and the foundation of the Third Republic in 1871, France was convulsed by more revolutions and counter-revolutions than any other country in Europe. In those hectic eighty years there were two Empires, two absolute monarchies, two constitutional monarchies, two liberal and two radical republics. It was this which prompted Marx to comment that history repeated itself, the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce. In the course of those turbulent years, almost every conceivable ideology had its brief taste of power. For this reason much of the rhetoric of French political life was not about a vision of the future, but about reviving the glories of a particular period in the past. For this reason too, political currents that rejected the government of the day were never merely disaffected; they were organised, vocal and active.

By the end of the 19th century France's Third Republic still contained powerful reactionary elements that were extremely anti-republican. What strengthened these groups was the unshakeable belief in French society in general of the superiority of French culture over any other and a deep sense of humiliation at France's subordination among the European powers. Foremost in every Frenchman's mind was the terrible humiliation of defeat at the hands of Bismarck's Prussia in 1870. The Third Republic had signed the treaties surrendering Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, and this shame was to haunt France until she finally secured

their reintegration at the Versailles Peace Conference after World War I.

Thus France was already experiencing in the 19th century what Germany was to go through between the wars. Convinced of her superiority, she was in fact subjected to peace conditions that she considered shameful and appalling. The Republic which had legalised the robbery of national territory by a foreign power was widely regarded as a clique of traitors. Society was rife with rumours of plots and coups, and obsessed with fifth columnists who were held to have stabbed France in the back.

The Dreyfus Trial & Action Francaise

France did not have to look far for her scapegoat. Antisemitism burst out in a spectacular theatre of hate during the Dreyfus trial. The affair began in 1894 with the court-martial of a Jewish army officer, Alfred Dreyfus, for high treason. He was sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil's Island, after the Paris mob had watched him ritually stripped of his rank screaming "Death to the Jews!". The case opened every division between progressives and reactionaries, and the fight raged for years. Finally the novelist Emile Zola, in his famous pamphlet *J'accuse* (I accuse) exposed how the documents used to convict Dreyfus were in fact forgeries. He also showed that the military judges who had convicted him knew this at the time.

The collapse of the Dreyfus case and the exposure of the reactionary conspiracy drove ultra-conservative elements in France into a frenzy. In 1898 a new organisation sprang up called the Ligue de la Patrie Francaise (League of the French Fatherland). The founders were deluged with over a hundred thousand applications for membership.

In the same year Charles Maurras formed an organisation called Action Francaise. This group may be considered the ideological forbear of modern French fascism. It was fanatically pro-Catholic and anti-Protestant; pro-Monarchist and anti-Third Republic; pro-Empire and anti-Jewish. It consisted at first of a group of like-minded intellectuals meeting in a Paris cafe and occasionally publishing a pamphlet.

This marginal existence was

transformed when, in 1906, a court finally rehabilitated Dreyfus. Action Francaise activists stood up in the courtroom and denounced the judges as traitors. Two years later the group began publishing a newspaper, and Action Francaise bootboys beat up a liberal professor of history during a lecture at the Sorbonne University in front of his students. In another incident, the President of the Republic was slapped across the face by an AF sympathiser. On the last day before the outbreak of war in 1914, the Socialist leader Jean Jaures was assassinated by a man inspired by Action Francaise propaganda.

Allied victory in the Great War muted the screams of French reaction to no more than an underlying growl. The Third Republic emerged from the battlefield intact and strengthened. Alsace-Lorraine was reunited with France, and the rich German coalfields of the Saar were placed under French control. Germany was also forced to pay monumental sums to France in war reparations.

The watershed of the war meant that 19th century notions of a restored monarchy were consigned to the history books. Charles Maurras continued to lead Action Francaise however, and to maintain a strong pro-monarchist line. While mainstream conservatives were satisfied with the post-war settlement, Maurras clung to an outdated political philosophy, leading Action Francaise up a dead end. Most of all, Action Francaise failed to mobilise any mass support in the effective way that first Mussolini, then Hitler succeeded in raising. The old atmosphere of the Paris intellectual cafe lived on, and the potential of rallies, radio broadcasts and other methods of mass-communication were completely ignored. Action Francaise was not defeated by anti-fascist action; it committed political suicide.

In the inter-war years other small organisations sprang up, inspired by Mussolini, but none was able to muster the support their hero commanded. Conservatives dominated parliament for two decades, and so fascist groups turned their attention to the question of control of the streets, disrupting left wing meetings and organising attacks on Jews and political opponents. This is a common division of labour, of course.

Vichy

The collapse of the Third Republic brought Maurras and his political associates the real possibility of a fascist-style French state for the first time. France was unique in its response to the Nazi menace. Of all the nations faced with Hitler's onslaught, France was alone in surrendering her sovereignty - the French parliament acceded to its own liquidation. Marshall Petain ruled the unoccupied part of France from Vichy, with the embarrassingly enthusiastic support of Charles Maurras.

Indeed, most of France acquiesced enthusiastically in its own Nazification. Collaborators greatly outnumbered resistance-sympathisers almost to the end of the war. One of the most harrowing aspects of the recent trial of the Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie was how it brought into the open once more the extent of French collaboration with the Nazis. The only active resistance was largely Communist-dominated.

It was this strength of Communist resistance which concerned Roosevelt and Churchill. At Churchill's behest De Gaulle, who had lurked in London for much of the war, was spirited across the Channel after D-Day to front the non-Communist resistance. At the end of the war, a few big-name collaborators were put on trial, including, of course, Charles Maurras. He was dragged off to his prison cell shouting "This is Dreyfus' revenge!". However, neither De Gaulle nor his Anglo-American backers were primarily interested in Vichy leftovers. They were much more concerned that the Communists were surging forward in public support, and had a real chance of forming a pro-Stalin regime in Paris.

The Vichy Head of State, Marshal Petain, and his Prime Minister Laval, were both sentenced to death, but this was commuted to life imprisonment. The majority of low-level and medium-level collaborators were reintegrated into the institutions of the new Fourth Republic, a process which was formalised through an official amnesty for collaborators and Vichy officials granted in 1953. The French police force in particular was full of Vichy veterans, and the alliance of various right-wing elements succeeded in warding off the Communist 'menace'. Vichy



renegades have continued to resurface in French political life ever since. Latterly, the French Minister of the Interior in the mid-eighties, Pasqua, had previously held office in the Vichy regime.

De Gaulle & Algeria

The infant Fourth Republic was modelled fairly closely on its predecessor, the Third, and faithfully reproduced its weaknesses and instabilities. It was in fact only the arrogance of De Gaulle which saved it. He formed a violently anti-Communist and nationalist party called the French People's Rally, which took 40% of the vote in local elections in 1947. He then demanded that parliament dissolve itself and allow a new, authoritarian constitution. But as one political commentator put it, to most people, "a bad republic was still preferable to a good tyranny." His influence fell away sharply and his bid for power failed.

The Fourth Republic had an air of déjà-vu in which the old battles of the Dreyfus era came to the fore again. Once again France was confronted with a crisis of weakness which did not sit easily with its grandiose self-image. The fiasco of the French plan to crush Egypt's nationalist leader Nasser in the Suez Crisis of 1956, with the help of Israel and Britain, exposed the country's military weakness and subservience to the new power of America. The failure of the French to re-establish their rule in Vietnam, and in particular the humiliating defeat of France's elite military units at the hands of poorly armed Communist-led Vietnamese nationalists at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, forced France to concede independence. Tunisia quickly followed Vietnam into formal independence. The fact that it was a Jewish Prime Minister, Pierre Mendes-France, who signed the colonies away only refuelled the old reactionary conspiracy-theories and made extremists dig their heels in all the harder over Algeria.

It was the conflict in Algeria which brought the fascist far-right to the fore again, and which was to sow the seeds of support for France's current leading exponent of fascism, the Front National. The Algerian War of Independence began in 1954. It was a particularly bloody and brutal war since Algeria had so many French colonists living on its soil - well over a million. They grew ever more frenzied in their demands that the Paris government use harsher and more effective methods against the Algerian nationalists.

They were echoed in France by a new right-wing extremist party led by Pierre Poujade. This grouping combined outraged shopkeeperism at home with extreme imperialism abroad. This absurd but very strident political movement polled around 10% of the vote in the mid-fifties - a base of support that was to resurface thirty years on for the Front National. The future leader of the Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen, led a group of extremists even

FN leader Jean Marie Le Pen spewing his racist filth.

more right-wing than Poujade in Parliament, and made a name for himself by organising a thousand policemen in a noisy anti-parliament demonstration outside the National Assembly.

Finally, in 1958 two French generals in Algiers staged a putsch, and this was closely followed by another in Corsica. It was clear that the army in France supported the rebel officers, and that the government in Paris was about to fall. Desperate to save itself, the Fourth Republic summoned De Gaulle back into office with sweeping emergency powers.

The Third Republic had liquidated itself, voluntarily accepting French fascist rule as marginally preferable to German fascist rule in 1940. Eighteen years later, France was once again undergoing that strange experience of repeating history. The Fourth Republic dissolved

itself since it considered a right-wing militarist it knew to be preferable to ones it did not.

The Front National

The Fifth Republic has so far survived 23 years. Dominated throughout the sixties and seventies by right-wing leaders, it finally saw a Socialist government elected in 1980. Socialist Party leader Mitterand has consistently adopted a policy of stealing conservative thunder to pre-empt a rightwing backlash. So far as mainstream conservatives are concerned his policy has been largely successful, but the eighties have seen a new wave of ultra-rightwing revival in the shape of the Front National.

The Front National currently has 10 Euro-MPs, over 1,000 local councillors, one mayor, and a parliamentary representation which was recently drastically reduced by the abolition of proportional representation. The party has in excess of 100,000 members. It runs three national newspapers, two of which are weeklies. The third, a daily, has a circulation of 100,000. It is, in other words, by far the most successful far-right movement since De Gaulle's French People's Rally in the mid-fifties, at the height of reactionary panic over Algeria. Its principal powerbase was in the South, where racial tensions were particularly high. Here the colonists who had left Algeria in 1961-62 came face to face with very large numbers of North African migrant workers. The party's initial successes were in and around the port of Marseilles, the gateway into France for Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan workers entering the country.

The racist anti-Arab campaign rapidly struck chords in other parts of France too, particularly when Mitterand steered through a law granting amnesty to illegal immigrants in the early eighties. The industrial working class of the northern cities was experiencing a sudden high wave of unemployment as Mitterand's quasi-monetarist policies hit them, and the added threat of cheap North African labour undercutting their wages led to a wholesale abandonment of the Communist Party in its traditional strongholds, most notably the "Red Belt" in the working-class suburbs of Paris, as workers rallied to the racist and protectionist calls of Jean Marie



One of the Front National's rivals on the ultra right.

Le Pen.

France's political parties indulged in the usual chestbeating and rhetoric about defence of the Republic, but were unable to match their squeamish distaste for the Front National with any strategy to defeat it. In some areas the threat it posed was so overwhelming and so disorienting that parties traditionally strong in the region could find no other strategy to fight it than to imitate it. The most notorious example of this was when a Communist mayor led a racist mob in an attack on a migrant workers' hostel.

After several years of vacillation and expressions of horror, the establishment came up with a "solution" in yet another repetition of history. The Gaullists, this time in the shape of the 1986 Chirac cabinet, abolished proportional representation, which robbed the Front National of the majority of its seats in parliament. This manoeuvre proving insufficient to muzzle Le Pen, it was followed up by the Socialist government last year, which began a major initiative to improve housing and the environment in the Paris suburbs, hoping thereby to regain the loyalty of the Paris working class to a vaguely leftist programme. But the central question is how serious is the government about devoting the necessary resources? Given Mitterand and his friends' record over the years, it is impossible to believe that this is anything more than electioneering and window dressing.

It is no coincidence that the fascists grew so strong during a period of Socialist Party rule. Mitterand was originally elected on a left-reformist ticket in alliance with the Communist Party, committed to policies like those put forward by Tony Benn and other Labour Party leftwingers. But in power, the

leftist pretensions soon fell away, and the administration settled down to the serious work of making the working class pay for the deep crisis that French—and world—capitalism was going through. A similar process happened in Britain in the 70s. The combination of anti-working class policies and nominally socialist—or at least social democratic—ideology created a political opening for the far right.

The situation in France had an added twist, though. Throughout the postwar period, the Communist Party had been the party of opposition, the anti-establishment party which naturally attracted the protest vote. It was, and remains, the largest political party by far in the country, with over 600,000 members and a very widely circulated daily newspaper, *L'Humanite*. At its peak, the CP could poll a third of the votes cast. But the progressive rightward shift of this party, under the guise of Eurocommunism, the name given to the attempt to combine acceptance of the capitalist state and its political system with the traditional Communist commitment to socialism, and in particular its willingness to participate in an anti-working class government ended by making the party virtually indistinguishable from mainstream social democracy.

One does not have to be a supporter of the CP's previous policies to see that this transformation could not but lead to disillusionment both within the ranks of the party and among those it used to influence. The Communist vote declined sharply, with the Socialist Party and the Front National both gaining ground at its expense. But the most significant point here is that the rise of the fascist threat was causally linked to the decline of

the main force which had opposed fascism in France, a particularly dangerous combination which has now been partially reversed since the CP left the government and consciously attempted to return to its roots. But while the CP has reasserted its control in the "Red Belt" electorally, the fascists remain a major force, and not only in terms of votes. Elections, local and national, are very important, of course, but control of the streets is, literally, a matter of life and death. In this respect, it would be a grave mistake to regard the Front National as the only threat—alongside these "mainstream" fascists there are a plethora of smaller even more violent Nazi groups and terrorist networks.

The major anti-racist campaign in France, SOS Racisme, has been very successful at getting young people to pop concerts, selling badges, and letting off coloured balloons. But it has also demanded that the police disperse anti-racist demonstrations in Metz, fearing that these might bring "bad publicity". You cannot regain control of the streets with that type of politics.

The experience of the last century in France has been that ultra-rightwing movements can draw on deep currents of racism, chauvinism and fear of working-class organisation. It has also been that establishment politicians have no effective strategy for combatting it. A rising tide of fascism is confronted first with the rhetoric of disgust, and then with acquiescence, either to the fascist threat itself, or to authoritarian right-wing rule which is almost as bad.

The recent rise of the Front National has disoriented even France's only previously effective anti-fascist force, the Communist Party, and left liberals and anti-racists cooperating with the police to suppress militant anti-fascist organisation. France desperately needs an anti-fascist organisation that does not either concede most of the arguments to the Front National, or attempt to fight it with slogans and general goodwill to men.

If such an organisation does not arise soon, then France may find itself repeating its own tragic history once again. If it does, then the farce may not very easily be distinguished from the tragedy.

Andrew McDowell

CABLE STREET BEAT

FIGHTING TALK MAGAZINE

Fuel for the Fire

The above is the title of the German tour in January and February of two British bands, the Dik Ugly Ensemble and The Beggars. The aim of the tour was to raise money and support for the Anti-Fascist Action Defence Fund and the Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign (TSDC). The tour was organised by AFA affiliates billed under the heading of "Cable Street Beat" in Britain and a couple of Red Aid members in Germany.

The tours were accompanied by a film showing struggles in Britain since the miners' strike—inner city riots, the Wapping dispute, the anti-poll tax campaign with the battles outside town halls and at Trafalgar Square, and the Strangeways riot.

The film also showed the history of the skinhead movement in Britain. Although this is becoming popular in Germany there is an ignorance amongst many German skinheads of the movement's working-class multi-cultural roots. This film set the record straight and put the movement in its proper historical context.

In all the Dik Ugly Ensemble undertook nine gigs and The Beggars eight. Venues included Berlin, Bremen, Hanover, Kiel, Duisberg, Giessen, Hanou, Eutin, Detmold and Rostok in the 'old' East Germany. On a number of occasions groups of fascists threatened to attack the concerts but on no occasions were they confident enough to try and carry out their threats.

Some of the venues which held the gigs were owned and managed by the anti-fascists themselves, and both bands agreed that it would be great to see similar venues being established in Britain.

One especially exciting event which took place when the Dik Ugly Ensemble band were in Rostok was to witness school students marching out of their schools to protest against the start of the Americans' attacks on Iraq in the Gulf War.

Because of the costs (especially travel) involved in organising the concerts not as much money was raised as was hoped. However, over £150 was given to both the AFA Defence Fund and TSDC.

"Overall reception was good, the people hospitable to a fault, and everywhere we found a lot of interest in the anti-poll tax struggle and other struggles of

the British workers," the Dik Ugly Ensemble told us on their return.

The Beggars saw the tour in similar terms. "The response to the political aspect of the tour was overwhelmingly enthusiastic and encouraging, with people talking about going off and organising anti-fascist benefits themselves. Important contacts were made and strengthened, particularly amongst skins of the SHARP scene and also the German section of Class War, who have had individuals attend the AFA mobilisation and pickets at Brick Lane. Many people took down addresses of poll tax prisoners and also the AFA address to send mail to the prisoners."

Anti-Fascist Action would like to thank the bands and everyone who helped organise the tour. Over 5,000 people attended the concerts. It would however like to thank Karsten Weber in particular for the work he carried out to make the tour a success. Karsten has organised tours and raised thousands of pounds for the miners, printers, seafarers, the United Campaign Against Plastic

Bullets, TSDC and AFA.

A fuller report on the first leg of the tour appears in the TSDC Bulletin Stand Firm number 6 on sale at 50p (plus postage) from TSDC, c/o Brixton Law Centre, 506 Brixton Road, London SW9. Tel: 071 833 8958.

NOT SHARP ENOUGH

Recently 2-tone band The Selector reformed and played a blinding gig at The Powerhouse in London. The venue was packed solid; The Selector stomped through all their classics; the sweat was flowing and the dancefloor was literally swaying in unison with the masses of crazy feet.

However it has to be said that the atmosphere at the gig was a bit uneasy, due to the antics of a certain element in the crowd.

A group of seven or eight boneheads, identified as being fascists because of their dodgy t-shirts and badges, were spotted drinking in a nearby pub before the gig by some anti-fascist activists.

Amazingly, the fascists gained

entry into the venue. All they had to do was remove the offending regalia.

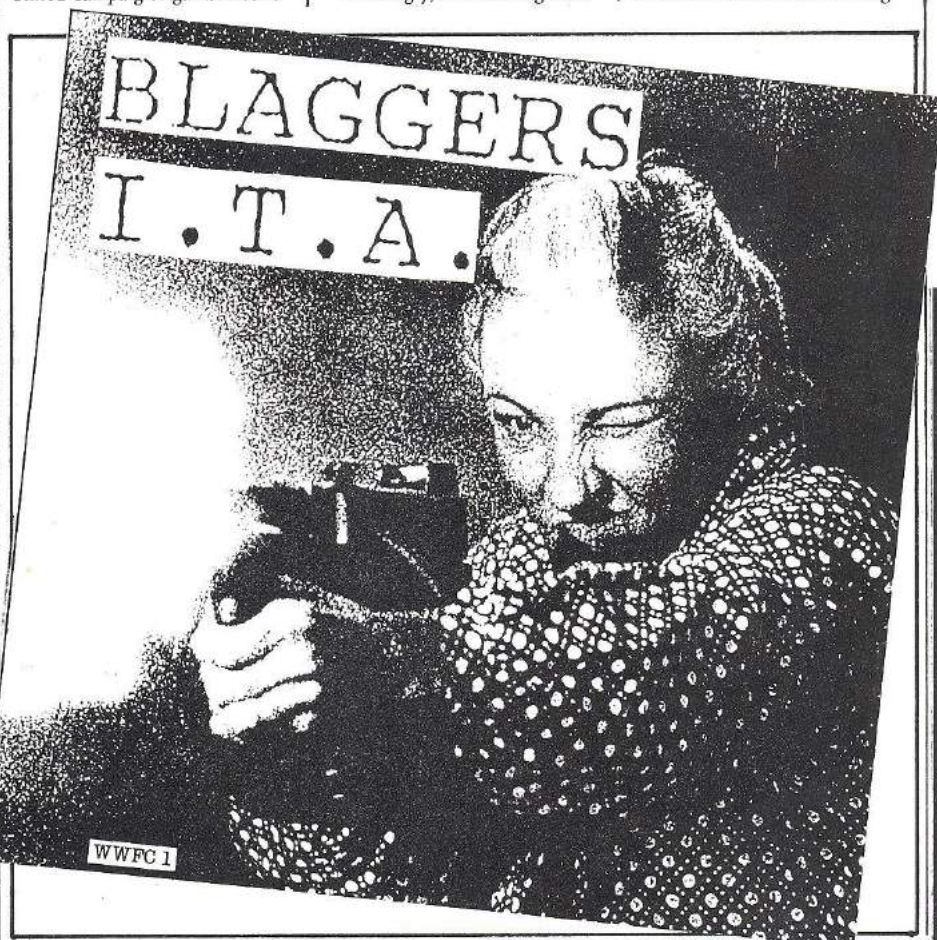
Naturally, there was some concern over the safety of the gig in the wake of the nazi attack on black reggae singer Desmond Dekker a few weeks earlier.

Fortunately this was not repeated at The Selector gig, but the decision to let these nazis in was dangerous and a disgrace to the organisation set up to promote the positive, anti-racist side of the skinhead movement, Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (S.H.A.R.P.).

It is doubtful whether the venue, bands or indeed most of the crowd knew there were fascists at the gig. But the fascists knew there was an anti-fascist presence alright, and proceeded to point out the anti-fascists to other groups of skinheads.

Among the skins in question were some wearing S.H.A.R.P. badges and even S.H.A.R.P. tattoos, which you would have thought meant they were anti-racists.

But after the gig, the fascists and their cohorts were waiting



CABLE STREET BEAT

outside for the anti-fascists, who were by now strongly outnumbered. The security on the door prevented the anti-fascists from leaving with empty bottles, and so they decided to wait behind and eventually the fascists departed.

There are a number of questions which stand out clearly from this incident, and they need to be tackled urgently. Fascists are still turning up to ska gigs largely unchallenged. The week after they attacked the Desmond Dekker concert, they had a visible presence at a Bad Manners gig, just a few days before The Selector gig.

This cannot go on. The fascists must be challenged and confronted by bands, audiences, venues and gig organisers—now! To nip the problem in the bud is essential—if we don't, the result will be yet more attacks on concerts and a boost in confidence for the fascists.

It certainly doesn't help when the so-called anti-racist skinheads team up with fascists. When skinheads with the S.H.A.R.P. logo are seen socialising with fascist boneheads, some questions have to be asked.

It's been said before, and it will be said again, but there can be no sitting on the fence over the issue of fascism. You are either anti-fascist or pro-fascist—it's as simple as that.

Wearing anti-racist badges and teaming up with fascists is worse than hypocrisy—it's condoning fascism and racism.

There can be no question of generalising about all S.H.A.R.P. skins on the basis of this one incident. Many are 100 per cent solid anti-racists. But there is an underlying political criticism of S.H.A.R.P. which cannot be ignored.

Some skinheads in S.H.A.R.P. describe themselves as *non-racist*. This is not enough.

S.H.A.R.P. has never described itself as political and has primarily concerned itself with portraying a positive, anti-racist image of skinheads as a reaction to the media's negative and often sensationalist coverage of skinheads, condemning them all as racists.

Cable Street Beat and Anti-Fascist Action have received mail from S.H.A.R.P. groups who are just as anti-socialist or anti-communist as they are anti-nazi. One slogan is: "Commies and nazis—give 'em both the boot!"



Racism is a tool of the capitalist system used to divide and control the working class, and the fight against racism is a class issue and a political issue. S.H.A.R.P.'s failure to tackle the problem of racism and fascism in a political context, preferring to concentrate on presenting skinheads in a good light, is a negative thing for a positive organisation to be doing.

In the incident at The Selector gig, the skinheads involved were clearly only into S.H.A.R.P. from an image point of view and not for the anti-racist cause that S.H.A.R.P. stands for. This shows what can result from failing to tackle the issue from the right perspective.

SLO OFF THE MARK.

A new anti-fascist skinhead organisation has been set up in England called the Skinhead Liberation Organisation (SLO). Like S.H.A.R.P. it was originally set up in America and has been launched here as an alternative to S.H.A.R.P.'s non-political stance.

SLO aims to concentrate on combating all forms of racism, fascism, sexism and homophobia. This means, as they put it in their first newsletter, "supporting the class struggle and smashing the ruling class oppression."

For more information and to receive the regular newsletter, contact SLO via PO Box 253, Oakengates, Telford, Shropshire TF2 6UH. (Donations to help pay for the newsletter are most welcome, they tell us!)

RECORD REVIEWS

"Don't Call Me Vanilla"—The AK47s

Shit title. Crap cover. Excellent record. This debut album by Tottenham's finest contains solid songs of resistance set to catchy tuneful reggae. No compromising musically or lyrically. The highlights are "Tottenham Three" ("Set them free 'cos they're not

guilty"), "Spirit of Resistance" ("From Tottenham to Belfast, the struggle's the same") and "Toicfaidh ar la" ("Said dear Johnny you are next, gave him a present of Semtex, Hurrah hurrah, Toicfaidh ar la"). With bands like the AK47s around the spirit of resistance will remain very much alive.

"The Table of Uncles" (Mini LP)—The Price

Another shit title and naff cover, but a good record. This is the long-awaited debut 12-inch slab of vinyl from The Price, and a worthy successor to their two punchy singles. Buzzing poppy/punk guitar riffs backed by melodic vocals have earned them comparisons with The Buzzcocks and Ruts. Solid anti-fascist band who, incidentally, played at the very first Cable Street Beat gig and have played many more since then. Definitely a band worth supporting.

"I feel fine" (Single)—2 Lost Sons

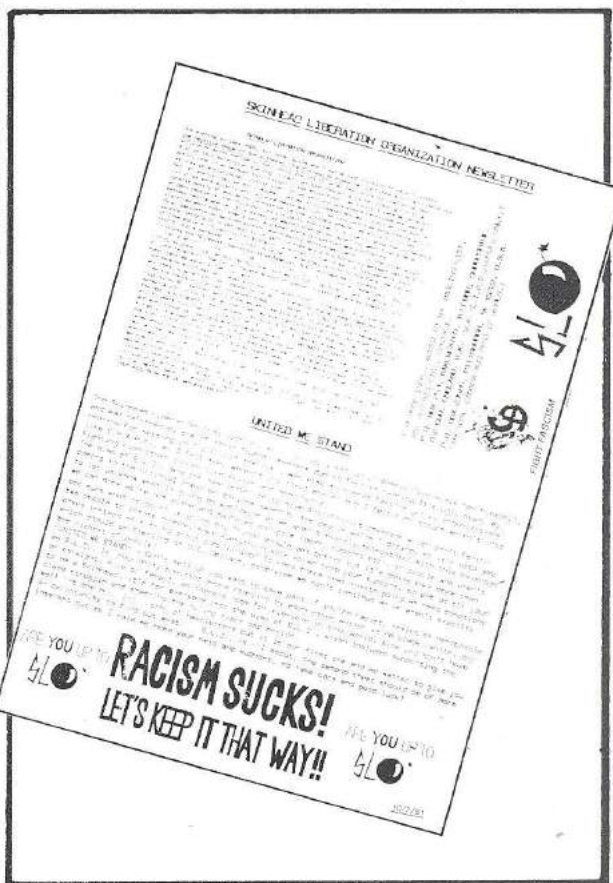
2 Lost Sons seem to have moved

away from their "Big Audio Dynamite meets The Clash" type sound in this, their debut single for Savage Records. "I Feel Fine" is an uptempo ravey sort of song which is instantly likeable. "An American Abroad", which appears on the B-side, is a slower acoustic ballad telling the story of the poll tax uprising, making your memory drift away to that eventful day of March 31st. A classic.

On the 3rd and 4th May this year Cable Street Beat took part in an international anti-fascist festival held in Italy. The event was organised under the banner "Gridalo forte—No al Fascismo, No al Razzismo" (Shout it loud—No to Fascism, No to Racism) by a group called "Banda Bassotti", and took place in a massive squat in the grounds of a ruined fortress, Forte Prenestino, near Rome.

CSB along with Anti-Fascist Action and Red Action were invited to speak at the gathering, as were representatives of SCALP from France and Carla Capponi, a woman veteran of the Italian anti-fascist resistance during Mussolini's dictatorship.

Our speaker gave a short



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Anti-Fascist Action is a democratic and non-sectarian organisation, dedicated to fighting fascism. We welcome affiliations from labour movement organisations and individuals committed to taking part in that struggle. If you or your organisation would like to become a member or affiliate of Anti-Fascist Action, and be informed of future meetings and activities, please fill in the form which is inside this magazine or if it has already been used, write to:
AFA, BM 1734, London WC1N 3XX.

CABLE STREET BEAT


The stage at the Forte Prenestino.

communicating on an international level the importance of this cannot be exaggerated.

The second day of the festival ended with an open-air gig which attracted approximately 4,000 people. The entertainment was provided by old punk favourites The Angelic Upstarts, Beggars I.T.A. and Bulimia Banquet. Despite a weak P.A. the bands overcame the poor sound usually associated with open-air gigs and the place kicked—particularly during The Beggars I.T.A. set. The night climaxed with members of all three bands on stage for versions of White Riot and Guns of Brixton.

The venue had to be seen to be believed. The Forte Prenestino is one of the largest squatted centres in Europe and is used for meetings and gigs, as a cafe/bar, and also has facilities for video shows, a theatre, recording and rehearsal studios. All that remains of the old fort is the portaculis gate, the only entrance (ideal for security), tunnel-like corridors and a load of cavern-type rooms which used to be cells. Video shows, exhibitions, stalls and posters were among the other

attractions at the festival.

The publicity was extensive. It was rare to walk down a street in Rome and not see a poster for the festival. Unfortunately this was also the case with fascist graffiti, Celtic crosses and posters, providing a stark reminder that fascism in Italy is a growing and worrying threat. Despite this, though, the festival went ahead unchallenged by the fascists. But a few weeks later they launched an arson attack on a different squat in another part of the city in which one man died. history of AFA and CSB before going on to give details about the current fight against the BNP in London. It was stressed that the fight against fascism is a class issue and fascist ideology has nothing to offer the working class, and that the working class must therefore lead the fight. When the speaker called for the fight to be taken to the fascists to make them react to anti-fascist initiatives, rather than the other way around, the crowd responded enthusiastically, as they did to the call for unity on an international scale based on the principle of fighting fascism on both political

and physical levels.

Carla Capponi spoke briefly about the resistance to fascists during and after the war. She pointed out that people have always attacked the resistance to discredit the Communist Party. Before 1947 the resistance was united, but splits occurred after that date. She said fascists are currently exploiting fears about immigration to their advantage.

The SCALP speaker told the crowd how the group was formed in 1984 in the fight against French fascist leader Le Pen, and how the group now works in defence of immigrants and political refugees, and takes direct action against fascist demonstrations. The speaker said that the neo-Nazi Front National now had 10,000 members, and that it had grown over the years largely due to the inadequacies of the governing "Socialist" party.

In general the meeting was positive and hopefully more such international meetings will be held, helping to lay the basis for a broad-based militant anti-fascist network across Europe. With 1992 just around the corner and the fascists already organising and

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