



FASCISM

HOW TO SMASH IT



10p

INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

Published by IMG publications, 97 Caledonian Road, London N1

Printed by Prestagete Ltd. 0734-581804

SUBSCRIBE TO

RED WEEKLY

NAME.....

PAPER OF THE
INTERNATIONAL
MARXIST GROUP

ADDRESS.....

.....
.....
DOMESTIC: £5 per year
£2-50p for 6 months.
FOREIGN: £9 per year surface mail.
£12 per year airmail.

Write to RED WEEKLY (distribution),
97 Caledonian Road,
LONDON N1, England.



2 Other Journals
Published by
the IMG

INTERNATIONAL

Pierre Rousset on
COMMUNISM IN VIETNAM

THE ECONOMICS
OF DÉTENTE

MANDEL
ON SPAIN



Luis Martin Lucio Colón
THE LESSONS OF CHILE

Socialist Woman

A JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP



Available from
RED BOOKS

RED BOOKS

RED BOOKS on FASCISM:

The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany *Leon Trotsky* £1-65p.

Fascism and Big Business *Daniel Guerin* £1-40p.

Fascism:- What it is and How to Fight it *Leon Trotsky* 25p.

RED BOOKS is open: 10 am. to 8 pm. (Monday to Friday).
10.30 am. to 5.30 pm. (Saturday).

Mail Order: Add 15% post and packing on all orders under £5.
15p post and packing on all orders under £1.

97 CALEDONIAN ROAD
LONDON N1 9BT,
ENGLAND



FASCISM

How to smash it.

Over the last half-decade the European left have had the misfortune to see the rise of vigorous fascist organisations in nearly every European country.

In Italy, the MSI is now a major national political party. Represented in Parliament, supported by many thousands of votes at election time, the MSI has carried out violent attacks on workers and students, helped to burn down trade union headquarters, been implicated in several major bombings, and involved in one abortive military coup. In France, the Ordre Nouveau has flourished. It has helped to organise pogroms on North African workers living in France, and has gained a base in one union, the CFT, organising among many groups of workers, including those in the automobile industry. During the recent elections, it impressed itself on the public as a stewarding force for Giscard d'Estaing's election meetings.

In Britain, the National Front stood 90 candidates in the October General Election, and claims to be Britain's fourth largest political party. It is less astute with bomb and gun than its European friends, but has developed vigorous agitation on the streets, even attracting organised workers.

Opposition to these parties has been strong. In Italy, a fascist bomb attack on a workers' demonstration at Brescia recently led to a wave of popular outrage and several MSI offices were burnt to the ground. In France, the Ligue Communiste was banned in June last year after leading a demonstration against an anti-immigration meeting the Government had allowed Ordre Nouveau to hold in Paris. And in Britain, the National Front march through London this June provoked a battle between police and the Left in Red Lion Square during which one anti-fascist militant, Kevin Gately, was killed.

Fascism is again a subject of debate in the workers' movement. Inevitably, one on which there is much confusion. This pamphlet tries to assess exactly what sort of threat an organisation like the National Front represents.

One notion on the Left is that fascism is just around the corner. This often arises from the misuse of the term "fascist" to describe, for example, the French riot police or the Gaullists, or, in Britain, the Industrial Relations Act. These have nothing to do with fascism. They are part of the development of the "strong state", the main enemy facing the workers' movement today. Confusing this with fascism would lead to a fatal under-estimation of the terrors of real fascism when it comes along.

This is a point which needs to be made again and again. But there is a further debate: What *priority* should be given to fighting the very real fascist organisations which have sprung up since then? To answer this, we must ask: The strong state will remain the central danger, but what role do the fascists play in developing it, and what role can the struggle against fascists play in defeating it in favour of the socialist revolution?

To capture the terms of this debate, we have put things in a question-and-answer form.

1. What is a fascist movement?

The class struggle under capitalism isn't a two-sided process—workers versus capitalists. There are many people who fall into neither of these two classes: these include small capitalists, farmers, shopkeepers, artisans, self-employed people, managers, students, military men, bureaucrats, and people who live off stocks, shares and savings.

These groups are constantly driven into debt, bankruptcy or ruin by capitalism. Under the whip of capitalist competition, the big bosses are constantly concentrating production, putting smaller firms out of business. Managers and technicians are hit by rationalisation and mergers. Farmers collide with big capital over food prices, since those who pay workers their wages want food prices to be kept low. Inflation hits those living on fixed incomes and drives them to despair since they often have no means of bargaining.

So long as capitalism is relatively stable, these people are able to change their trade or join the ranks of skilled workers. But in an economic crisis, they find themselves in a dead end. The banks won't extend their credit and competition for workers' jobs grows fierce as unemployment increases.

Unlike the big bosses and the bankers, they are unable to save themselves by transferring their assets abroad, investing in foreign enterprise, or indulging in massive tax evasion. On the other hand, the minimum protection workers can gain through trade unions isn't available either. The export of capital and the closing of factories, combined with "inflationary strikes" by workers, make these people in the middle feel as though the world has gone mad.

These groups develop a double-edged antagonism. Those driven out of business hate the banks and the big monopolists, but equally despise the workers' movement which they blame for inflation. Those sacked through mergers feel betrayed by the big monopolies, but hate the workers on the shop floor for driving the company to rationalise by their demands. War veterans returning from lost wars feel betrayed by the politicians who sounded the retreat on orders from the Treasury and the banks, but resent the workers for failing to make further sacrifices.

As a consequence, the parties of big capital—the Tories, Gaullists, Christian Democrats—can no longer rely on the passive support of these groups. Sections of their social base break away in open hostility. People who were politically passive now take to the streets to demand concessions from big capital plus much tougher measures against the workers and their leaders than the Government of the day may feel it tactically wise to take.

The antagonism between these groups and big capital is only *latent* so long as capitalism is relatively stable. The source of the problems facing these groups lies in the continual concentration of capital, but big capital can obscure this fact and win their political allegiance so long as an expanding world market opens up new fields of production. Once capitalism runs into difficulties, the allegiance of these groups can change. But this will only be the case if the workers' movement can win them for socialist revolution. If not, then the fascists, continuing to obscure the source of the problem, will organise these groups to demand that the capitalist class once more re-asserts its supremacy within the global imperialist system. The fascists will build a movement of militant nationalist revival, on the basis that foreign capital and finance capital, rather than just capitalism, is the source of the problem.

According to the fascists, there was a time when the class struggle didn't have to take place because the "nation" was strong. Everybody prospered. The cause of the disaster is that the nation has failed to sustain its place in the world. The reasons for this lie with the "traitors within" who have joined with those abroad who seek to undermine the nation. The answer is to get rid of the traitors so as to allow the nation to fight once more. Foreigners in the banking system—usually Jews. Militant workers who have lost their "national spirit"—communists. Liberals—who promoted permissiveness and "alien culture". Pacifists—sapping the nation's determination to win wars and hold onto empire. Traitor capitalists—those who sell out to foreign interests, or who employed immigrant workers rather than their fellow citizen-patriots. And finally the whole capitalist political establishment and its parliament—impotent because subverted by international communism and high finance.

Fascism is capable of winning over large numbers of workers to a mass movement of this kind because of its apparent anti-capitalist radicalism. If the traditional workers' organisations prove incapable of overthrowing capitalism in the midst of economic disaster, many workers will desert them for movements which offer other "solutions". This is especially the case if racism, national chauvinism and faith in imperialism have grown unchallenged among workers.

In reality, and despite its rhetoric, this radical popular movement only grows up with the aid of money provided by big capital itself. As history shows, once fascism is in power, it rules in the interests of the monopolies. Capital concentration continues. If there is a contradiction here for a fascist movement, it is resolved by killing off the most militant elements (the purge for example of Hitler's brownshirts) or absorbing them into a state apparatus bloated out with spies, terrorists and fascist bureaucrats. The reason why big capital puts money into fascism's coffers, and fascism into power, really comes down to this: the fascists are able to destroy the workers' organisations, by exterminating the militants, the social democrats and communists who form its backbone, precisely because fascism is a movement *of the masses*, which utilises the *rhetoric and forms of organisation to which the masses are accustomed*.

This is an "achievement" beyond the capacities of even the best organised military dictatorship. The army might suppress all the bourgeois democratic liberties of the workers'

movement. But the paid soldier is ultimately no substitute for the fascist soldier—for the fascist is inspired by passionate political conviction and hatred for his political enemies.

2. The workers' movement isn't facing a threat of that kind today. If there is repression, it comes from the State—the Industrial Relations Act, the Pay Laws, the police, the Special Patrol Groups, the Army, etc. These are used to stop strikes or occupations, not armies of fascists.

This is absolutely true. Even in countries like Italy where the signs of a *mass* fascist movement are unmistakable, the main strategy of big business is to strengthen the State. This may result finally in military takeovers, but not, at least for the foreseeable future, a fascist regime.

The reasons for this are simple. Fascism arose in Italy and Germany when it did because the capitalists had nothing left to fall back on. The armies were no match for the workers. The German revolution had in fact begun in the armed forces with the creation of soldiers' and sailors' councils. The imperialist war had left only the elite corps reliable. In both countries, it was only when the workers were thrown into political confusion and despair by their own leaderships—for example the defeat of the factory occupations in Italy in 1919, and the crushing of the insurrections in Germany by the social democrats—that the bourgeoisie saw its chance to recoup by means of fascism. In Italy, landowners and industrialists paid for gangs of *fascisti* to terrorise workers' meetings, attack street demonstrations with razors and bombs, and burn down the headquarters of trade unions and peasant leagues. The economic ruin of the petty-bourgeoisie and the disappointments left by the failure of workers' revolutions, provided a reservoir of human material for a fascist enterprise.

Today, the problem for capital in Western Europe is quite different. The workers' movement is organisationally powerful after twenty-five years of full employment and rising living standards. The bourgeoisie must wear down this organisational strength without provoking any rapid growth in the political maturity of a labour movement dominated by decades of reformism.

To unleash fascist gangs in this situation would be adventuristic. The workers' movement remembers fascism quite well enough to drive these gangs off the streets, arming itself in the process against capitalism itself. In Italy, the fascists were given a very bloody nose after Brescia. Even a military coup has to be approached with very great caution for fear of provoking an armed reaction by the labour movement.

As well as all this, the petty-bourgeoisie doesn't have the same kind of social weight it did fifty years ago. The relative importance of the agrarian sector has certainly declined. At the same time, large numbers of white-collar and technical layers have been "proletarianised" and joined the trade union movement. And students, from whom fascists once drew their hard core, are today overwhelmingly left-wing. All in all, therefore, the traditional social forces available for a fascist expedition against the working class are weak.

3. In that case, there is no point mobilising workers to defend themselves against a non-existent fascist threat. Isn't it a diversion from the main struggle?

It is true that the strong state is much the most important *repressive* threat. But to appreciate the importance of the fascists, and for that matter the strong state, both of them have to be understood not simply from a military-technical angle. As we shall see, it is not a lack of armaments that prevents the bourgeoisie from making progress with the strong state, and it is precisely because of certain *political* capacities that we must give the fascists more importance than the weight of their numbers or their guns and bombs suggest.

A strong state is not just a matter of increasing the number of police, passing more repressive laws, or introducing the army onto the streets. Such moves could only be successful, given the working class is so organisationally strong, if *as well as* inflicting an organisational defeat, a section of workers can be won over through their *political* weaknesses to passive, or better active, support.

This is a principle the Tories understood well.

Following the failure of *In Place of Strife*, the bourgeoisie drew the conclusion that the trade union bureaucracy was no longer reliable. Not because it had ceased to be politically faithful to capitalism, but because it could not exercise control over the organised rank-and-

file. Therefore they supported the overthrow of Labour and promoted the return of a Tory Government, which, having no links with the bureaucrats, would brush them aside and employ tougher methods.

Heath & Co. never expected to be popular with workers. Nevertheless, they knew they could play on their political weaknesses. For example, when the Pay Laws were introduced, they tried to win over weakly-organised groups of workers, pensioners and others, by blaming the inflation on the powerful unions and giving handouts to those in a weaker position. The narrow corporate outlook of the powerful unions assisted them.

When dockers struck over the jailing of their comrades under the Industrial Relations Act, the Tories tried to win support by appeals to "law and order". When the Industrial Relations Act failed, the Tories were able to succeed in jailing Shrewsbury building workers by using *criminal* law against them. Confusion over the question of law assisted them.

Finally, when the miners threatened to overturn the Pay Laws, Heath posed a series of questions. Who rules the country, unions or Government? Were the unions ready to assume the responsibilities of government? Didn't the unions believe in parliamentary democracy? Wasn't the miners' strike perhaps a plot by those who, allegedly, didn't believe in this political system—the communists? These were the questions the traditional working class leaders couldn't answer.

One of the best cards of all is racism. One of the things which won the 1970 General Election for Heath was racism. For a Tory government would surely include Enoch Powell, or at least some of his supporters. Powell had struck a chord in the working class with his "rivers of blood" speeches in 1968—thousands of workers struck in 1968 when Powell was sacked from the Shadow Cabinet.

Subsequently, when the Tories allowed unemployment to rise by withdrawing cash from "lame ducks" and squeezing credit, they were able to point to their 1970 Immigration Act—surely this would deal with *one* threat to jobs, the Tories said, the coloured immigrant workers! In 1973, Heath and Carr went further and up to 10,000 black workers were turned into illegal immigrants liable to instant deportation by a clause introduced into the Act through the House of Lords.

None of these stratagems saved the Heath government. The working class had too much confidence in its organisations and its militancy for that. But the bourgeoisie has not abandoned the experiment. Not a single big industrialist supports Labour's attempts to replace confrontation with "social contract".

This is not the only headache for capital. Heath lost the February election, not only because of the working class, but because the Tory Party was unable to retain many of its own petty-bourgeois supporters. *The alliance of big capital and the petty-bourgeoisie was disintegrating under the impact of the economic crisis.*

This fact was illustrated in a number of ways when the Tories were in office. The main issue around which division crystallised was the Common Market. Many smaller capitalists will be driven to bankruptcy by the international concentration of capital which entry into the EEC will assist. Others who treasure the traditional links with Commonwealth found a hole in their pocket and a severe dent in their national pride. Many farmers have strong doubts about their future in the EEC. Many of these people switched their allegiance to Powell or to the Liberals. (This was another reason why the Tories introduced the most extreme racist policies—in an effort to mend shattered loyalties.)

Another issue was Heath's failure to deal with the unions. Those living on fixed incomes didn't feel, unlike big business, that they could afford the luxury of discussions between Government and TUC at Number Ten. It wasn't the time for tactics. It was time to bash the unions hard. Even then, however, Heath failed. The Liberals answered that Heath needed profit-sharing policies which they advocate should be introduced into the factories. The Tory establishment can't appreciate this, say the Liberals, because it isn't "of the people". Other erstwhile fans of Mr. Heath now follow Keith Joseph and others in demanding several million unemployed as the cure for "inflationary" wage militancy, throwing political caution to the winds.

Other traditional Tory faithfuls have started to crawl around in the woodwork and sap the morale of the Tory machine. Ex-military men, disillusioned by loss of empire, defence cuts, and what they see as capitulation before the "lawlessness" of strikers, independently start to organise private armies like GB 75.

Finally, the policy of reforming Stormont and dismantling the Ulster Ascendancy in order to preserve British imperialist domination over Ireland has led to the collapse of a whole section of Tory support: the Unionist vote in Ulster. This was a shattering blow to Heath.

The problems for the bourgeoisie are therefore immense. On the one hand they must re-unite all the anti-working class forces. Yet this could only be done if a sharp defeat could be inflicted on the organisational power of the working class. For only with a fairly immediate prospect of a permanent upturn in business profits could these internal divisions be healed by promises of handouts from the proceeds. But to inflict such a blow is not all that easy and could well provoke a revolutionary upsurge from the workers' movement.

The ruling class can find no guaranteed solutions to this problem. A Tory-Liberal coalition, coming to power on the basis of setting up a government of "national unity" would pull out all the political stops—panic talk of an immediate threat to parliamentary democracy, bankruptcy of the country, cultivation of racism and chauvinism—but even then, without being able to show results in terms of defeating the working class, such a government could not guarantee the unity of the anti-working class forces or to stay in power for long. Nevertheless, such a government would try with all its might to exploit the political weaknesses of the working class, and would help to lay the basis for strong state solutions under more favourable circumstances. The key figure in a strong state operation—in which fundamental changes in the constitution would be carried out on the basis of confusion and demoralisation of the workers—would be somebody like Enoch Powell. Powell is even now able to win a certain active support among the working class as a racist and as a "principled national leader."

4. So where do the Fascists fit into all this?

By the late '60s, the European fascist groups had given up living off the rags and tatters of the past. They had begun to understand that to make political headway, they had to build a mass movement on the basis of taking up *political campaigns*, starting from the level of consciousness of those who would make potential recruits for such a movement.

The history of the National Front shows this quite clearly. It was formed in the winter of 1966 out of several neo-Nazi groups. Many of these groups had engaged mainly in burning Jewish synagogues and other Nazi rituals. (In a two-year period, 1964-66, some 35 such premises suffered arson attacks). Men like Jordan, Tyndall and Webster ("We are building a well-oiled Nazi machine in this country") were convicted for arson, possession of firearms and training paramilitary groups.

Burning synagogues is generally discouraged nowadays by Front leaders. Joseph Short, their student organiser, left the Front after he led an arson attack on a Jewish synagogue in Sheffield in 1969. Not that all such links with the past are severed. April 20th, Hitler's birthday, is still celebrated by the Front leadership, and two National Front chairmen, A. K. Chesterton and John O'Brien, denounced the leaders as Nazis on leaving the Front. "Members of the National Front are going over to Germany, seeing ex-Nazis and ex-members of the SS and taking part in their reunions," said O'Brien.

Putting these things in the cupboard marked a new political maturity for the Front. It began to grasp the essential *content* of a fascist movement, and put aside any fetish about forms.

In grasping the essential point about a fascist movement, the fascists have avoided a mistake which some on the Left make today. This is to mistake the most *dramatic* feature of fascist activity—military parades and uniforms, petrol bombs and acts of violence—for the *essential* activity of fascism. Modern-day fascists have been forced to learn this through bitter experience. The early Italian fascists employed direct military attacks from the very first days when they numbered only a few hundred strong, and by this means attracted tens of thousands to their movement. To repeat this today with a few hundred brave fascists leads only to isolation and physical defeat.

What distinguished Hitler's brownshirts from the regular bourgeois army was not the number of guns. It was their high degree of political commitment and sophistication. This can be seen clearly by looking at fascism in power. The fascists didn't just exterminate left-wing militants. They *replaced* them. The fascists, before and after coming to power, created their own "trade unions" (illegalising all others), social clubs, welfare and youth organisations to replace those "dominated by communists, social democrats and other traitors". In other words, the fascists don't *just* exercise violence against sections of the masses, they *reorganise* the

masses—using the methods of agitation, organisation and struggle traditional to the masses themselves. Street and factory-gate meetings, street demonstrations, mass rallies, strikes, pickets, petrol bombs, barricades and finally revolvers: these are the methods which the masses traditionally employ at various stages of their struggle. It is this ability which makes the fascists so valuable to capital because by these means *one section of the masses can be set in motion against another* on the side of capital.

What the fascists in Europe today are seeking to do is to build up reactionary mass movements which can gain the first footholds in terms of the streets, the factories and the picket lines. As Goebbels said: "Whoever controls the streets also conquers the masses and whoever conquers the masses thereby conquers the state". This is something the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie, with their emphasis on parliament rather than on popular mobilisation, cannot do. As John Tyndall recognised: "The intention of the National Front is to do what the Tories have not done and cannot do, to fight the Left on its own ground in the Unions and wrest control of the Unions from it."

This should in no sense be taken to mean that the fascists neglect to work in Parliament. On the contrary, every fascist movement, including the National Front, builds up a presence in Parliament. The fascists use Parliament to put across their ideas and proposals to the ruling class. At the same time, fascist movements generally come to power *legally*. Unlike socialist revolutionaries, they do not mobilise masses of people to overthrow the capitalist state. However, the support the bourgeoisie gives to fascists is not on the basis of the number of candidates they have in Parliament, but on how effective they are on the streets and in the factories.

The tactic of the fascists is to organise and lead mass movements, however limited these may be, to demand from the Government tougher measures—against immigration, against the IRA, against the dictates of the EEC, for more law and order and so forth. In other words, to act as *the strongest agitators for the strong state*. But at the same time, the fascists continually argue *within* these movements that the popular establishment is corrupt and will not meet these popular demands. Therefore popular, extra-parliamentary measures must increasingly be taken by these agitated masses themselves. In other words, the fascists seek to drive these mass movements to *outflank the State towards the direct methods of repression characteristic of fascism and which the seizure of power would legalise*.

To summarise: The fascists specialise in organising street demonstrations, pickets, strikes, and petitions in favour of their reactionary policies. These actions are around highly *political* issues. The fascists act as the political vanguard of the right. Only insofar as these activities are successful can the fascists, under the protection of these agitated masses, undertake acts of violence, either of a mass character (pogroms, attacks on left-wing demonstrations) or a clandestine character (individual beatings of black people or members of the Left). This is the present relationship between the "military" and "political" activity of the fascists which flows from the whole nature of the current situation.

Increasing numbers of people among the petty-bourgeoisie, because of their alienation from their traditional leaders, are not prepared to simply vote in a passive manner, but to demonstrate and picket over the EEC, immigration, Ireland, law and order, and so forth. They take to the streets to demand tough action and condemn the "sell-outs" of their leaders. Alongside this, workers have shown they can be mobilised against their fellow black workers. At some factories recently—Mansfield Hosiery, Standard Telephone & Cables, Imperial Typewriters—racist workers have struck or taken other forms of industrial action against the demands of the immigrant workers whom the bosses have used as super-exploited labour only because of the complicity of the white working class. Thousands struck over the entry of Ugandan Asians. Millions of workers are prepared to take to the streets against the Common Market on a chauvinist political basis.

It is these mass actions which the NF regard as key to building a reactionary popular movement which can provide the fascists with their power base. The National Front has built an organisation claiming 20,000 members and 8% of the electorate by two tactics. First, it has placed itself at the head of every racist upsurge among the working class. Secondly, it has entered the traditional Tory Party organisations—the Monday Club, constituency parties, anti-immigration lobbies and tenants' associations—and turned their members onto the streets in a series of vigorous political campaigns. In particular they have tried to capture the Powellite base—first on immigration and now on Ireland as well. (The Front once invited Powell to chair the Front.)

Anti-immigration activity provides the best examples of the overall strategy of the fascists in practice.

When the Ugandan Asians issue blew up last year, the Front were active immediately: "The National Front started its series of nation-wide 'Stop the Asian Invasion' demonstrations on Friday 18th August by holding at very short notice a picket of Downing Street in Whitehall, London . . . by 7 pm more than 200 NF members and supporters had assembled . . . this demonstration won a considerable amount of national and provincial press publicity." A few days later came the strike of Smithfield Meat Porters on August 24th. This was led by Ron Taylor, a member of the NF. "Immediately the decision was taken, NF members got to work duplicating thousands of leaflets advertising the march on behalf of the ad-hoc Smithfield Workers Against Immigration. These leaflets were immediately distributed to all Fleet Street newsdesks and supplies were taken to NF Branch organisers who arranged for their distribution at several London docks, at the Covent Garden and Billingsgate markets, at GPO sorting offices, railway stations and many other workplaces." So successful was the first Smithfield march that a second was held two weeks later. "It had a tremendous impact on the nation, encouraging workers in many different cities to hold their own local demonstrations. The meat porters became a symbol of the will of the working people of Britain to resist the alien take-over of their land." (*Spearhead*, August 1973)

All this agitation had its effect. Combined with, and reinforcing, the dissent inside the Tory Party rank and file, the Tory Government ensured that the House of Lords passed the retroactive ruling, the Pakistan Act (making it impossible for many immigrants to hold jobs in the Civil Service) and deprived Kenyan Asians with UK passports of the right to enter the UK. Popular agitation had led to repressive legislation.

The Front itself seized this opportunity to go further. Riding on this mass movement of backward workers and frenzied petty-bourgeois elements, the Front developed ever bolder forms of direct action:

"The NF members turned up at the Airport [Heathrow] with the intention of filling up the reception centre which had been provided by the Government's Resettlement Board for the purpose of doling out to the Asians money and details of jobs and accommodation . . . The Government clearly wanted to avoid the Resettlement and Race Board having to face this embarrassment, so the Police were instructed to drive NF members from the premises . . . savage fines were meted out by Uxbridge Magistrates against ten NF members, who had loaded onto them as many charges as the Airport Police could cook up from the London Airport by-laws." "Manchester NF has also been holding a series of demonstrations at an important point of entry for the Asians." (*Spearhead*, August 1973)

In other words, the fascists helped to organise a mass movement within which they took a number of actions designed to *directly implement* its demands, and which indicated the way "forward" for the movement towards *popular policing* of any Government measures which might be forthcoming.

Other forms of direct policing—of a more "clandestine" type—of reactionary legislation have come to light. For instance, when the retroactive ruling was passed, Jim Merrick, who leads the British Campaign to Stop Immigration in which the Front are very active, offered a £100 reward for the longest list of "illegal immigrants". In the Civil Service, Front members no doubt took advantage of Keith Joseph's relaxation of the rules governing the passage of information between one department of the social services and another, to hunt out "illegals". The aim was to deter immigrant workers from using the social services altogether. In the universities, the Monday Club, heavily infiltrated by the NF, regularly passes on information to the Home Office on the political activities of foreign students. Here we see the embryo of the police state, complete with spy and surveillance networks, which the fascists are out to build.

Other examples of fascist strategy can be found in other prominent political campaigns the Front seeks to build. For example, the Front stand for British withdrawal from the EEC. They participate in street demonstrations, and in at least one case, the NF militants tried to organise blacking by dockers in aid of 3,000 sugar workers in East London who faced redundancy due to EEC sugar policies. Still further, the Front advocate "sabotage and other illegal actions" against measures introduced by Brussels, such as VAT. The NF must be driven out of any working-class movement against the EEC. After Red Lion Square, it will at least not be possible for the CP to march with the Front on this issue.

On Ireland, the Front has demonstrated against the IRA along with Orange Loyalists. At the same time, it has for some years been campaigning for a boycott by dockers on goods to and from Ireland in support of its anti-Irish demands, and earlier this year, the Front succeeded in stirring up ex-servicemen's families and local residents to physically assault the march held annually by Republicans in Manchester to celebrate the Moston Martyrs.

A further example will no doubt soon emerge after the Scarman Tribunal (set up to use the events of Red Lion Square as a pretext for extending police powers) fails to recommend that the Communist Party, the IMG and the International Socialists are prosecuted for conspiracy. Once the "corruption" of the Establishment has been proved yet again, the Front will have hoped to provide itself with enough mass backing to take yet another small step forward in intimidation of the Left—to try to expel the Left from union branches and physically assault individual left-wing militants, or at least encourage this. (Recent months provide examples—the attack by "patriots" on the CPB(ML) bookshop in Brighton, shotgun attacks on left-wing squatters at 220 Camden High Street, London.)

An even more serious threat exists with the private armies which are being canvassed on the Right. We suspect that the Front has already established links with these, at least at local level. If a Tory Government creates a citizen reserve army, guess who will provide the most enthusiastic recruits!

This dialectic operates in every single issue the Front takes up, including questions connected with the bourgeois family. The Front is active for example in the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child which campaigns against abortion and contraception. As an organisation with an ideology of bourgeois militarism, the Front sees itself as a protector of the family, the wife taking care of the home while the husband fights for "his country". The liberation of women from hearth and home and the liberation of sexuality are violently opposed by the Front. Gay people in particular, whose sexuality is not linked to the production of children (for the workforce and for the "race") have much to fear from fascists. Like all bourgeois militarist institutions, the Fascists will persecute gay people outside their organisations while providing a home inside their organisations for gays driven by their oppression to extreme male chauvinism and hatred of women. In all this the Front can make its own special contribution—the direct policing of repressive censorship laws, physical assault on gay people and so on.

Even much of the overtly military activity of the fascists in Italy falls in the same strategic framework. In 1969, four bombs exploded in the Bank of Agriculture in Milan. Sixteen people were killed. The Government, the press and the fascists blamed "anarchists". Several anarchists were indeed arrested for this crime and held for over four years while awaiting trial. Only recently did it become widely recognised that the anarchists were framed and the bombings carried out by fascists, almost certainly of the MSI. A plot to conceal this fact involved people like the Secret Affairs Department of the Ministry of the Interior and the Chief of Police in Milan. Many others—prominent industrialists, politicians, judges and army figures were also involved.

MSI documents reveal the purpose of these bombings. They were part of a "strategy of tension". By creating panic and uncertainty, the bombings gave trade union leaders an excuse to tone down the workers' struggles, and in some cases call off strikes altogether, on the grounds that "anarchy" might result. Second, the government was able to move onto the offensive against the Left. At the end of 1972, the revolutionary Left in Italy calculated that *seventy per cent* of its entire membership were either in prison, on trial or facing charges for a variety of political "offences". Finally, the government was able to introduce a wide variety of measures which would otherwise have provoked an outcry. In short, the bombings allowed the State to strengthen itself by appearing as the guardian of "law and order" and the saviour of "civilisation".

And of course there is the final twist in the tail. The MSI cried that the State had not been tough enough against "anarchists". Therefore, the MSI proposed direct actions against the Left. These have escalated from attacks on left-wing school militants to the bombing of union headquarters.

To return to the original question. The fascists provide a *political* vanguard of the Right. Even the military activities of the MSI are designed to bring about a political atmosphere in which Government policy can be driven to the right. In other words, the aim of the fascists is to strengthen the State. In fact, the fascists—by employing the methods of the masses themselves, strikes, pickets and demonstrations—provide one of the *cutting edges* for the

acceptance of strong state methods by the masses. It is the fascists who are able to make the deepest and most active political penetration of the workers' movement, cutting a furrow for the political demagoguery without which the strong state is impossible.

5. I agree with all this, but surely the fascists are still very small in number, and the best way to take up the political weaknesses of the working class is by fighting those weaknesses through political explanation, not by fighting the fascists.

If what we have said is true, that the fascists provide a cutting edge for the strong state, then they act as one of the props in the central bourgeois strategy of the period.

However, the fascists are of course not strong enough at this stage—at least in Britain—to play a *really major* part in neutralising workers so that the strong state can be established. The major part in this is still played by the dominant political forces in society—the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie. These can have some successes because of the politics of the trade union bureaucracy and Labour Party leadership.

Nevertheless, over and above stopping the growth of the National Front, the reason for giving such emphasis to it, is this. The workers' movement hates fascism, and rightly so. The Front does not present itself as a fascist party, but cultivates its "respectability" by posing as a "workers' organisation" through taking up political issues on which workers often quite spontaneously take reactionary positions. By exposing the Front for what it is—a *fascist* organisation—it is possible to lead the workers' movement to question many of its own backward traditions by showing how dangerously exposed it actually is to fascist infiltration. These backward traditions are precisely the same traditions which assist the bourgeoisie to develop the strong state.

6. Why should we be in favour of "No Platform for Fascists" as a method of fighting them, and what does this slogan mean?

There is now a massive debate going on in the labour movement over whether there should be free speech for fascists, and if not, why not. On September 7th, the labour movement denied Hyde Park—symbol of free speech—to the National Front. Even the Labour Party has taken the step of refusing to speak on the same radio and television broadcasts as the National Front during the October election campaign.

If the modern fascist parties in Europe developed in the same way as Hitler's and Mussolini's forces did in *their* early days, there would be no debate about free speech for fascists. If workers were attacked by shirted gangs armed with revolvers, then the workers' movement would start to defend itself physically. Of course, the traditional workers' leaderships would oppose armed struggle against the fascists, as they did in Italy and Germany. Nevertheless, the issue would be clear for all to see: self-defence or extermination by fascism.

The fascists attract support today not by bombs and guns, but by street demonstrations, strikes, pickets and other methods of the labour movement. This is not to ignore the need for physical self-defence—especially by the Left, black people and so on—but simply to place this in its proper perspective.

The aim of "No Platform for Fascists" is therefore to deprive the fascists of the weapons they are relying on to develop. The streets, the picket lines, and the factories must be denied to the fascists. This is what "No Platform" means.

Without being able to march through the streets—and especially to conduct acts of public intimidation by marching through black areas—the Front will not be able to act as a pole of attraction. Without being able to pass racist resolutions through the unions or organise strikes against black people, the Front will not be able to participate in and organise the sort of trade union activity that deters black workers from fighting through the unions. Without being able to agitate on the streets against black people, the Front will no longer be able to stir up violence against black people or gain the sort of mass cover needed to beat up a black worker and his family "to make an example" and "teach them a lesson". And the same goes for every other political, religious or racial group whom the fascists have selected for their enemies.

That is why the fascists must be deprived of a platform.

It is precisely because the fascists *do* use traditional methods to project themselves as an

organisation, that the fight to give them no platform is so important. For the fascists want to present themselves as just another political organisation, "respectable" in the eyes of both the workers and the petty-bourgeoisie. But the fact is that the fascists make use of these bourgeois democratic liberties to create conditions in which they can destroy these liberties for the workers' movement and murder working-class leaders. Denying these liberties to the Front therefore indicates most clearly that the labour movement recognises these people as fascists. By exposing these people for what they are, the greatest number of people in the workers' movement can be alerted to their own political weaknesses.

7. What about those who object to "No Platform" in the name of Free Speech?

When the NUS first adopted the position of "No free speech for fascists (and racists)" earlier this year, Fleet Street launched a huge campaign against the NUS leadership. It is not so easy now. Hundreds of organisations now support this position.

To give a few examples since Red Lion Square: - The Manchester District of the AUEW called on Manchester City Council to ban the Front march planned there for August 24th. It called on the Government to reinforce this ban. Birmingham City Council has for some time denied facilities under its ownership and control to the fascists. So do many other local councils. Even a Government minister spoke in favour of the NF march through London on September 7th being stopped.

In fact, there is a lot of rubbish talked about "free speech", especially by Fleet Street.

Big business employs a monopoly over the means of communication. How often are the front pages of the big national daily newspapers turned over to trade unionists to put their views? Never. Access to information, without which nobody can form a sound opinion, is also strictly controlled. Laws of commercial secrecy and "state security" exclude the population from gaining access to information about the activities of those who govern their lives. And most effective of all, capital retains the right to *silence* people since they have a monopoly of the legitimate means of violence. So the formal existence of freedom of speech in no way indicates that everybody has an effective voice.

In view of this, the only reasonable conclusion we can draw is that the biggest obstacle to free speech is the bourgeoisie. Far from undermining "democracy", only the workers' movement, by expropriating these resources and smashing bourgeois political power, can turn whatever formal liberties it has forced the bourgeoisie to give, into real freedoms.

The real debate about free speech really revolves around the content of what is said and who is saying it. The bourgeoisie is quite in favour of shutting people up if what is said threatens them. Public campaigns are being waged all the time to get people to shut their mouths. Eric Heffer was warned not to criticise the Government's decision to sell arms to the Chilean junta. Mick McGahey, the NUM leader, was threatened with prison for suggesting his members should discuss with British soldiers the role they were being asked to play in the miners' strike, and Pat Arrowsmith has gone to jail for leafletting soldiers over their role in Ireland. Those who want to send arms to the Chilean butchers, or put the Army in against strikers or the Irish people, can say so; those who speak out against these crimes are supposed to keep quiet. This is free speech.

The bourgeoisie doesn't act by moral formulas. The working class can't afford to do so either.

Since it is only the workers' movement whose struggle achieved the right for it to have freedom of assembly, to demonstrate, and to freedom of the press, there is absolutely no good reason on earth why it should suffer these privileges to be extended to those like the fascists who seek to remove these rights from the workers' movement.

Many argue that stopping fascists from speaking is a cop-out from fighting their ideas.

This argument—which appears to start off from a just concern with politics—is actually opportunist. Those who say the fascists provide us with an opportunity to combat their ideas, are actually admitting that they are not continually striving to create such opportunities themselves. In other words, they normally capitulate to racism and chauvinism when the fascists are not around. This is tantamount to saying that the labour movement should not use its own resources to put its house in order, but invite its enemies in to give it a good hiding as a way of learning its lessons. This is not a good way to proceed.

In point of fact, this argument, which implies that those who stand for "No Platform"

are approaching the question of fascism in a "non-political" manner are often reflecting bourgeois prejudices about militants in the labour movement being "wreckers" and "thugs". And this stems from a failure to understand that free speech is an entirely relative matter. But in fact, depriving enemies of the working class is not exactly new or confined to fascists.

Racists like Powell or Harold Soref—who are not fascists—have often been driven off university campuses. This is because the effect these people can have is similar to fascists—that is, terrorising black people or others chosen as scapegoats for capitalism's social ills, and encouraging social violence, legal or otherwise, against them. What is more, these people provide a cover for people who are fascists. Workers at Mansfield Hosiery Mills for example allowed an Enoch Powell Supporters Group to be set up in the factory. They may not have known it was a front for the NF. Yet nobody who has driven Powell or Soref off a campus could be accused of failing to fight racist ideas.

"No Platform" has been applied to many people by the workers' movement. Trade unionists, for example, would generally expel employers who attended their meetings. Print workers sometimes censor by blacking a newspaper editorial attacking the unions. When Mr. Godber, Tory Minister for Agriculture, sent to Birmingham one day last year to do a public relations job for Tory price policy, he was mobbed off the street by angry housewives. All these actions are against "free speech" and sometimes involve a physical struggle. Compared to the provocation and violence of the bourgeoisie they show remarkable restraint. Nevertheless, they are necessary and show in embryo nothing less than the nucleus of a future workers' state power in practice.

8. "No Platform for Fascists" can involve a confrontation with the State. Isn't this a dangerous road to take? And wouldn't it be better to simply fight for laws to silence the fascists or if need be put them in prison?

It is quite possible to "oppose" fascism with purely legal methods. Many forces in the workers' movement do. The trouble is, it doesn't work.

The Communist Party for instance pays lip service to the "No Platform" position. They agree that fascists should not be allowed to spread their propaganda. But they argue that the way to stop this is to strengthen the law, particularly laws like the Race Relations Act.

But the first question to ask is why there have been so few prosecutions against the fascists under the existing provisions. For there is no doubt that slogans like "If they're black, send them back", "Wogs out", or placards saying "Bulldog Breed, not Mongrels" are calculated to incite race hatred liable to cause a breach of the peace.

It is of course possible, in the context of the massive anti-National Front campaign which has grown up over the last two years, that the bourgeoisie might attempt to take some of the heat out of the situation by bringing about a prosecution over some scandalous insult or NF leaflet. That is not the point. The Front successfully intimidate people and stir up social violence against them by their campaigns against black people, to which abusive language is not strictly necessary. The state will not take the step of making it illegal to demand repatriation and an end to coloured immigration. To do that would lead logically to the prosecution of many other people too—including prominent MPs like Enoch Powell and other figures who are quite central for the bourgeoisie.

This brings us to the heart of the problem: the capitalist state. Laws are enforced or not enforced according to political need. Even assuming that the instruments of law enforcement like the police ceased to be thoroughly racist—hardly probable—racist agitation would not be outlawed so long as the bourgeoisie reaps such rich economic and political pickings from discrimination.

This point applies more generally. In Spain and Germany, it was from among the forces of "law and order", the army and the police, that the fascists drew much of their support, war material and cadre. The same thing is clear in Chile today, where the *Patria y Libertad* is the only political party allowed to operate under the military regime. In Italy governments have been rocked over the corruption in the police, the judiciary and state bureaucracy in relation to the MSI.

This general truth becomes all the more obvious the more support fascists get from the bourgeoisie and their political representatives. The way we approach the fascists today, educates others for tomorrow. If we encourage reliance on the police and the courts today to defend us, we will disarm ourselves for the attacks of tomorrow, when the police will not

be around and the fascist assaults are much worse.

The incorrectness of demanding laws against fascists is shown by the history of those laws which have already been passed. The Race Relations Act has been used against black militants fighting race discrimination. Laws relating to political uniforms (the Public Order Act) originally passed against Mosley after his defeat on the streets have now been used against the Republicans. Laws relating to organising paramilitary forces will be used against any stewarding-defence organisation created by trade unions or left-wing political parties. Laws are not passed against "fascists" but against specific offences—most of which the workers' movement will commit at some time or another.

There is therefore no substitute for relying on workers' self-organisation to deal with the fascists. However, there are obviously a number of tactical and legal questions involved in this to which the anti-fascist movement must be sensitive if it is not to make mistakes for which it can pay a heavy legal and political price.

Spontaneous violence by individuals against fascists is absolutely inevitable. Fascists are hated in the working class. People whose predecessors carried out mass murder are not popular. Such individual violence will inevitably increase, especially to the extent that the Front are increasingly recognised by more and more people to be fascists. These acts will occur quite independently of the will of any particular organisation.

While those involved in such actions should be defended by the labour movement against attack by the fascists or the law, actions of this type do not provide a model of how to operate the "No Platform" position. If it was a matter of an open civil war between fascists and labour movement, then things would certainly be different. But the aim of "No Platform" in the present period—certainly in Britain—is not to "militarily suppress" the National Front. This would imply a policy of breaking up private meetings of the Front and so on. This is not how the IMG understands the "No Platform" slogan.

The essential aim must be to stop the major propaganda functions of the Front—marches, meetings and demonstrations. It is on these activities that the cycle of growth of the Front depends. Stopping these will break the back of its development, for it is on these things that the morale of the bulk of NF members depends.

By far the best methods to employ are those traditional to the workers' movement. The NF have frequently been stopped by mass pickets of the entrance to the buildings they intend to use, and in some cases by occupations of those buildings. Attempts to stop marches have been made by a mass picket thrown across the route. This was of course the method used at Cable Street in 1936 against Oswald Mosley's followers.

The overriding aim of the picket is to get the opponent march or meeting dispersed peacefully. If a certain numerical relation of forces is established, the opponent will be left with no choice but to disperse.

Nevertheless, the IMG has fought, notably in the NUS, for a policy of dispersal "by any means necessary" to be adopted. This clause is necessary because there are many people who see opposition to fascists simply in terms of a large counter-demonstration which does not involve any attempt to block the opponent's way. It is also necessary because there is no guarantee that the fascists will not attack the picket, or that some move to encourage the opponent to disperse will not prove to be necessary (*provided* the relation of forces is favourable).

A policy of picketing—rather than some other method—is adopted as the general rule, for both political and logistical reasons. The picket emphasises to the mass of the labour movement, who at this stage are not always sympathetic to a policy of dispersing fascists (because they do not experience them as a direct physical threat), the essential point about fascism: that it is something against which the labour movement needs to defend itself. But it is also for a second reason: namely, the State. The police will at all times defend the fascists from the threat of physical assault.

Of course there are never any guarantees that the police will not attack mass pickets. However, it is important to bear in mind that the police do not take decisions on the basis of the law. If they did that, they would be arresting people all the time. They take decisions on the basis of the relation of forces—both in the physical and the political sense. If counter-demonstrators to the fascists are sufficiently numerous, sufficiently organised for self-defence purposes, and the overall political climate is one of intense and growing opposition to the

National Front, the police will soon find themselves unable to attack pickets without paying a really heavy political and physical price.

That such pickets can be entirely successful and pass off peacefully was shown by the mass picket of Hyde Park on September 7th. The police were forced to divert the Front in this case, because they were unwilling to arouse the wrath of several thousand people, including many trade unionists, and because the crowd was organised for self-defence. The case of the mass picket at Saltley is another example.

When violence has occurred on these mass pickets it has generally been brought about by the intervention of the police. The police have attacked them because they felt it safe to do so—either because the support for the picket had not been built beforehand, or the police drafted in huge numbers to browbeat the pickets into dispersing without having a serious battle. But the authorities clearly want to avoid being placed in a position of political embarrassment. Hence at Red Lion Square, the police altered the route they had agreed with the demonstrators in order to avoid a picket being set up outside Conway Hall, and although they made what is from their point of view a mistake in attacking the mass picket which was later thrown up across Theobalds Road, they have since tried to say that this assault was not designed to take the National Front through, by claiming that the Front was intended to march along a different route all along.

During the election campaign, however, the police have frequently intervened while the pickets were being set up, resulting in a large number of arrests. We can expect police repression of this sort to increase in an effort to stop this policy of picketing the National Front before the opposition to the Front grows so large that the police are made to look foolish.

This emphasises the need for the maximum unity in action of the anti-fascist forces. Any policy by which one organisation takes on this sort of activity by itself, without seeking to unite with other forces who may be involved or may wish to become involved, can only lead to the most serious consequences. For this is an activity which *the State* has an immediate and direct interest in stopping. Unity in the face of physical and legal repression is an absolute first principle.

But there is a deeper problem involved here: the *political* relationship of forces.

The workers' movement will quite rapidly mobilise against anything it regards might lead to a repeat of fascism. The fact that a large and growing climate of opposition has been created since June 15th is indisputable. Even the Labour Party has come out and refused to have its election candidates standing on the same platforms or speaking on the same radio and TV broadcasts as the National Front.

However, the fact that this opposition is based on memories of fascism rather than the *concrete actualities* of an organisation like the National Front, contains both a strength *and* a weakness. Its strength is that whatever the Front says about itself, large numbers of workers automatically tar it with the Nazi brush. But its weakness lies in the fact that the Front does not conform to the image of a band of jack-booted Nazi stormtroopers. Rather, many people are taken by surprise by its "Britishness". Worse, many workers who hate "fascism" find that the policies of the front correspond rather closely with many of their own prejudices. There is therefore a danger that the movement against the National Front could founder on its own political weaknesses.

The anti-fascist tradition in the workers' movement—which is not without severe political weaknesses itself, such as social patriotism—must therefore be used not simply to smash the National Front. It must be used for more ambitious and more significant objectives than that. It must be used to direct the workers' movement towards dealing with its own weaknesses.

follow the international workers movement...

subscribe to

International
Press
Correspondence

INPRECOR



International Press Correspondence
International analytical journal of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

Published fortnightly in English, French, Spanish and German.

SUBSCRIBE!

£4 for one year (25 issues) from:

Inprecor, 97 Caledonian Road, London N1.

single copies can be obtained for 25p (post free)
from: **Red Books**, 97 Caledonian Road, London N1.

The International Marxist Group has played a leading role in the struggle against the National Front. We have participated in hundreds of anti-fascist meetings and conferences and dozens of anti-fascist actions up and down the country. We were in the thick of the battle in the Red Lion square demonstration and were to the fore in the September 7th mass occupation of Speakers' Corner to deny Hyde Park to those who count Hitler, Mussolini and Franco amongst their predecessors.

Our French sister-organisation, the ex-*Ligue Communiste*, led last summer's mass demonstration against the fascist *Ordre Nouveau* for which they were promptly banned by the French government.

The fight against fascism, however, is only a small part of our work. Along with every other section of the Fourth International, of which we are proud to be the British section, we fight for socialist revolution. Above all, this means the battle to build organisations of the working class which can overthrow the capitalist state and establish a new power: workers' power. Without this we know, like the Bolsheviks before us, that it is impossible to eliminate the anarchy and misery of capitalism.

It is with this goal that we participate in every battle of the working class, every fight for national liberation against imperialism and every struggle of those oppressed because of their sex or colour, that our resources permit.

If you want to fight with us or find out more about our work, contact us now:

INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP' 97 Caledonian Road, LONDON N1.

Name:

Address:

Occupation: