NEVER AGAIN

Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976–1982

David Renton

"I was gripped and loved the way it took me through different elements of popular culture, personal reflection and policy. It is the best account of the relationship between punk and the Anti-Nazi League/Rock Against Racism."

Lucy Robinson, *Professor in Collaborative History, University of Sussex*

"A must-read for anyone who wants to understand the post-war history of racist and fascist movements and the strategies of resistance to them."

Hsiao-Hung Pai, *author of* Angry White People

"David Renton's book helps us understand a pivotal moment in the defeat of fascism; it addresses the militant tradition of anti-fascism with real consideration."

Louise Purbrick, *contributor to* Physical Resistance: A Hundred Years of Anti-Fascism

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NEVER AGAIN

By 1976, the National Front had become the fourth largest party in Britain. In a context of national decline, racism and fears that the country was collapsing into social unrest, the Front won 19 per cent of the vote in elections in Leicester and 100,000 votes in London.

In response, an anti-fascist campaign was born, which combined mass action to deprive the Front of public platforms with a mass cultural movement. Rock Against Racism brought punk and reggae bands together as a weapon against the right.

At Lewisham in August 1977, fighting between the far right and its opponents saw two hundred people arrested and fifty policemen injured. The press urged the state to ban two rival sets of dangerous extremists. But as the papers took sides, so did many others who determined to oppose the Front.

Through the Anti-Nazi League hundreds of thousands of people painted out racist graffiti, distributed leaflets and persuaded those around them to vote against the right. This combined movement was one of the biggest mass campaigns that Britain has ever seen.

This book tells the story of the National Front and the campaign which stopped it.

David Renton is a British barrister, historian and author. His previous books include *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (1999), *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (2000), *This Rough Game: Fascism and Anti-Fascism* (2001), *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (2004, with Nigel Copsey) and *When We Touched the Sky: The Anti-Nazi League 1977–1981* (2006).

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Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976–1982

David Renton

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The Carib Club got petrol bombed
The National Front was getting awful strong
They done in Dave and Dagenham Ron
In the winter of '79

When all the gay geezers got put inside
And coloured kids was getting crucified
A few fought back and a few folks died
In the winter of '79

Tom Robinson, *Winter of '79*

PREFACE

This book tells the story of the National Front (NF) and two of its opponents in 1970s Britain: Rock Against Racism (RAR) and the Anti-Nazi League (ANL). The Front was a rising electoral force, in competition with the Liberals to become Britain's third party. The Front secured 44,000 votes in local elections in Leicester in May 1976. In March 1977, the NF beat the Liberal Party in a by-election at Stechford in Birmingham. At Greater London Council elections in May 1977, the Front secured just under 120,000 votes, beating the Liberals in 33 out of the 91 seats which both parties contested. With a paid membership of 13,000 people in 1976–1977,[1] the party had around twenty times more supporters than the Ecology Party (the forerunner of today's Greens) and more than any of the Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish parties.

Indeed, the NF was more than an electoral machine. Part of its appeal came from its association with violence. The Front was feared by its political opponents and by the victims of racist attacks. To give just two examples: in July 1978, a report by the television programme *World in Action* claimed that the first six months of the year had seen twenty-three separate attacks by the Front on its opponents in Leeds alone. Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council documented a series of attacks by Front supporters in the East End over summer and autumn 1978, ranging from sending people in large groups to chant racist slogans outside local shops to attacks by Front supporters on black people in the street or in their homes. One Front fellow-traveller, 20-year-old Fred Challis, pleaded guilty to the murder of a white vagrant in the East End, in which he smashed the man's face in with a gas cylinder, after which he had used the blood to smear the slogan 'NF rules OK' on a nearby wall. At his sentencing hearing, Challis admitted that he had carried out over three hundred attacks altogether.[2]

The National Front was an early example of a kind of politics which has since become all too familiar, a group influenced by the anti-democratic politics of

fascism but standing for election to Parliament. By the time of this book's publication, it has become conventional to date the rise of such 'Euro-fascist' parties to events in Northern France in 1983,[3] when the Front National's Jean-Pierre Stirbois won 16.7 per cent of the vote in local elections at Dreux in Normandy.[4] Yet before the rise of the FN, it was the NF which seemed most likely to achieve a breakthrough. In 1973, Martin Webster won 16 per cent of the vote at a parliamentary by-election in West Bromwich. In July 1976, a council by-election in Deptford saw the National Front and the National Party (a smaller split-off from the NF) win a combined 44 per cent, more between them even than the winning Labour candidate. The opportunity which opened up for the far right in France was no greater than the chance available to its counterpart here.

This book integrates a narrative and document-based history of the 1970s with interviews with anti-fascists who campaigned against the Front. The result is not an autobiography; I was too young to play any part in the events this book describes. I was at primary school in west London when Margaret Thatcher gave her infamous St Francis of Assisi speech ('Where there is discord, may we bring harmony . . .'). I encountered the crisis of the 1970s only in brief moments. I heard it the day 'Jew' became a verb among my classmates, 'Jew him', 'Jew you'. I saw it in the inkwell beside which a pupil had carved a swastika. It was the cough the other boys made as they jeered a racist insult and the shame on our teacher's face as he fled from the room. There were other signs as well, possible resources of hope: the punks who gathered to be photographed outside the Chelsea Drug Store, the bass-scale and patter-rhythm of an Ian Dury song ('Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll') blaring from a car radio, the graffiti I puzzled over as our school bus drove past the Westway, 'George Davis is Innocent', 'Justice for Blair Peach'. Summoning these memories is like watching fireworks; the colours flare, depart – and only the smell of gunpowder remains.

In 2007, I published a previous history of the anti-fascism of the 1970s;[5] this new book is, however, very different from its predecessor. At the time when I began writing about fascists and anti-fascists, the major threat on the British right was the British National Party which could plausibly be understood as a mere imitator of the interwar parties of fascist Europe. I was content to describe the National Front as a fascist party and to pass lightly over the exact nature of the group, the changing composition of its leadership, or the rivalries which swirled around the Front's chairman John Tyndall. By the time of this book, the energy on the right belongs to Islamophobic groups which owe little if any loyalty to Mussolini or Hitler and disclaim even the core fascist ambition of purging the liberal state. Indeed, for all the confidence with which the Front's enemies characterised the Front as 'Nazis', there were times at which even the National Front (or at least its minority factions) behaved something like today's post-fascist parties. Re-considering this history ten years later, I have had no choice but to look with greater care at the Front and how it organised.

There are an increasing number of memoirs written by former members of the Front. Where they (or, for that matter, their opponents) tell the story of the

1970s as a series of military confrontations, each one ending in yet another glorious military victory, I have disregarded them. Where members of the Front have written their memoirs with insight, acknowledging their mistakes, I have treated their accounts with respect. The resulting narrative is intended to go further than any previous account in integrating the stories of fascism and anti-fascism, showing how the tactics of the right forced the left to adapt and the other way around.

While much of this book is devoted to Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, I have sought to contextualise both campaigns. As well as the part which RAR played in the history of anti-fascism, it also occurred at a particular stage in the history of black Britain, just as the first mixed black-and-white generation of British youth reached adulthood. Consequently, there was a much greater opening for an integrated music scene than at any time in the previous twenty years. Any history of the 1970s must also acknowledge the mixture of possibility and threat posed to anti-racists by the rise of punk, which in turn requires an explanation of this cultural milieu and such dynamics as its relation to the memory of the Second World War, and the role played by old and new cultural media (the music press and the punk fanzines).

While in this book I do not limit my definition of anti-fascism to members of particular groups or people shaped by any ideology, still less a left-wing one, I do restrict the term to those who took action of some sort against the National Front. Anti-fascist activism took numerous forms, from leafleting voters to resisting a racist attack, from demonstrating in the streets to attending a concert.

The purpose of treating action as essential to the definition of anti-fascism is not to draw a line between politics and culture;[6] the distinction is instead between activity and passivity, between the opposition of fascism's repeated adversaries and of its occasional critics. Perhaps as many as 50,000 people joined the Front at some point in the 1970s, only to leave the party later in the decade. Even if all of those who voted for that party at least once in any election, local or national, are added together the resulting calculation still restricts the group's support to no more than 1 or 2 per cent of the adult population. It would be meaningless to treat the other 98 per cent of the population as a single granite bloc of anti-fascists. Hundreds of thousands of people despised the Front, while similar numbers were sympathetic towards that party or its programme of repatriation. If the press was to be believed, when most people read about the clashes between the far left and the far right, they wanted the police to eviscerate both sets of unwelcome extremists. And yet, as the decade wore on, opinions changed and the Front was increasingly seen as the greater problem. This book investigates why the National Front fell in popular estimation.

The late 1970s and early 1980s provide innumerable examples of people from Thatcherites to (ex-)Trotskyists who at one time were doing all in their power to stop the Front and at other times were in some sort of alliance with it. On the right, it would be meaningless to describe the Monday Club as anti-fascist in 1972, when the Club welcomed Front supporters to its events and gave Front leaders platforms to address its local meetings. A case could however be made for

the Club's anti-fascism however a year later, when its leader Jonathan Guinness expelled all known National Front fellow-travellers from the Club's ranks. The book extends a similarly nuanced approach towards the Labour Party, anti-fascist when it instructed its local authorities to refuse the Front to book halls on their premises, yet less impressive when its MPs tailed the Front in advocating intensified immigration controls. Even the far left was not without its renegades, as future chapters show.

This book makes use of a number of previously unexplored primary sources, including the report of Commander John Cass of the Metropolitan Police into the death of Blair Peach, one of two anti-fascists killed by police officers during the period of this book. In 2010, when the Cass Report was first published, a number of journalists reported Cass's findings; in other words, the name of the officer whom Cass believed had killed Blair Peach. The first attempt to summarise *why* Cass had felt confident to identify a suspect appeared in a piece I wrote for the *London Review of Books* in 2014.[7] This book's narrative of the events at Southall in 1979 builds on that account.

A further new source has been the archive of the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight*, now deposited at Northampton University. It includes complete runs of the main right-wing magazines, local reports from activists who passed on to the magazine everything that took place in their town over a period of several years and even correspondence between individuals on the right. Thanks are due to the archivist Daniel Jones for his assistance in accessing those papers. I am also grateful to the archivists at the National Archives and the Bishopsgate Institute for their help.

Over the past ten years, further accounts have appeared which, like this one, have been based on interviews with surviving anti-fascists. They include Daniel Rachel's compendious oral history of Rock Against Racism, *Walls Come Tumbling Down*.[8] Veterans of the same campaign have published *Reminiscences of RAR*.[9] Sean Birchall's *Beating the Fascists* is based on interviews with a generation of anti-fascists (the 'squaddists'), who were expelled from the SWP in 1981, formed their own party Red Action and later set up the UK's next major anti-far right alliance, Anti-Fascist Action.[10] The new edition of Nigel Copsey's *Anti-Fascism in Britain* contains valuable new material on the 1970s, as does his and Matthew Worley's collection of essays on the contemporary far right *Tomorrow Belongs to Us*.[11] Another AFA veteran Dave Hann, in his book *Physical Resistance*,[12] tells the story of the past hundred years' struggles between left and right from a physical force perspective. Hann's is a generous account, capable of giving credit to those whose behaviour he judged at other times reprehensible. I have attempted to emulate his non-sectarian spirit here and produce an account which should be broadly recognisable to all those who took part even if they might interpret any particular incident differently from me.

Some 80 anti-fascists were interviewed for my earlier book, *When We Touched the Sky*, and I have conducted a dozen further interviews for this new account. Previously, I published my interviewees' first names only; that caution is however no longer appropriate now that the majority of them are identifiable from other published sources.

I have discussed the ideas in this book with friends, including Jon Anderson, Anindya Bhattacharyya, Juliet Ash, Nigel Copsey, Colin Fancy, Craig Fowlie, Ruth Gregory, Arun Kundnani, Graham Macklin, Gary McNally, Louise Purbrick and Lucy Robinson. I am grateful to Syd Shelton for permission to use the cover image, to Tom Robinson, for allowing me to quote from 'Winter of '79', and to Craig Fowlie and Rebecca McPhee at Routledge and Jeanne Brady at Cove Publishing Support Services. Thanks are also owed to those who have loaned me documents from the period, including Annie Nehmad and Evan Smith, to Mitch Mitchell who gave me his collection of fascist and anti-fascist newspapers cut-tings, and to Lucy Whitman (aka Lucy Toothpaste) who granted me access to her archive, including materials from Rock Against Racism and Rock Against Sexism and copies of her pioneering punk fanzine, *JOLT*.

My greatest debt I owe, as ever, to Anne, to Sam and to Ben.

Notes

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IN ENGLAND, DREAMING

Any adequate explanation of the National Front between its launch in 1967 and its late 1970s high point must start with the history of Britain since the Second World War. In common with other parties of the extreme right, the National Front preached a message of national decline and reinvigoration saying that Britain was in crisis and could recover only under the Front's leadership. Of necessity, such a message could have had little resonance in the Britain of 1918, which was still one of the world's two principal industrial and military powers. The politics of national renewal could hardly have been compelling in the aftermath of the Allied victory in the Second World War, when Britain was chosen as one of five permanent members of the United National Security Council, nor in the early 1950s when one-fifth of the world's exported goods were still manufactured in the UK and the economy remained a leading force in the emergent technologies of electronics, computers and aerospace. Two decades later, however, Britain was in the words of the historian Robert Colls, 'No longer a world military power, no longer an imperial power, no longer a manufacturing power'.[1]

The absence of empire and the memory of war

There was no clearer sign of the country's decline than the loss of her colonies. In 1945, the British Empire included most of the Caribbean, all of the Indian subcontinent, much of the Middle East and a third of Africa. By 1976–1977, little was left other than Northern Ireland, the Falkland Islands and the dubious boon of Rhodesia, whose unilateral declaration of independence in 1965 continued to haunt British politicians (and inspire the Front) a decade later. Through the 1970s, the British suffered repeated reminders that they were a diminished force. Edward Heath's 1970–1974 Tory government announced five national emergencies. Such was the crisis in the private sector that in 1971 even the luxury car

manufacturer Rolls Royce was declared bankrupt and had to be nationalised. In winter 1973–1974, in response to a combination of miners' strikes and oil shortages following the war between Israel and Egypt and with interest rates standing at a punitive 13 per cent, the government introduced a three-day working week. In winter 1976–1977, Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey, who had once promised to 'squeeze property speculators until the pips squeak', applied to the IMF for the largest loan the Fund had ever granted.

The reason that Britain agreed to concede her empire was that a generation of British politicians were well aware that the UK had neither the military capability nor the economic resources to fight colonial wars on multiple fronts. On occasion, Britain did fight independence movements with murderous consequences, notably in Malaya (1947–1960) and Kenya (1952–1960). But from the perspective of Britain's ambitions to remain a colonial power the more significant conflict came at Suez in 1956 when Israel, the UK and France invaded Egypt to take control of the Suez Canal and remove Colonel Nasser from power. Egypt succeeded in closing the Canal and, Britain and France had no choice but to withdraw, after pressure was applied by the US. Prime Minister Anthony Eden resigned and was replaced by Harold Macmillan whose subsequent 'Winds of Change' speech to the hostile members of the South African Parliament in February 1960 acknowledged the inevitability of African independence.

In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, it had seemed possible that resistance to decolonisation might emerge within Parliament and one member of the Cabinet, Lord Salisbury, was touted as a challenger to Prime Minister Macmillan from the right. Salisbury was defeated, however, in 1957 and forced to resign.

The fact of empire gave opportunities to hundreds of thousands of British people. Merely by relocating abroad, a British civil servant would be charged with great power and find him- or herself making life or death decisions about others – where the subjects of empire were to be housed, whether at times of famine they were fed. In the words of George Orwell, writing at the end of the 1930s:

> [T]he over-whelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain but in Asia and Africa. It is not in Hitler's power, for instance, to make a penny an hour a normal industrial wage; it is perfectly normal in India and we are at great pains to keep it so . . . It is quite common for an Indian coolie's leg to be thinner than the average Englishman's arm. And there is nothing racial in this, for well-fed members of the same races are of normal physique; it is due to simple starvation. This is the system which we all live on and which we denounce when there seems to be no danger of its being altered.[2]

In the 1970s, there were still tens of thousands of British people drawing down pensions earned in years spent as colonial administrators. Hundreds of thousands of others had migrated to Britain from her white colonies. Yet the status of all these people depended on Britain's past, not her future. On the fabric of Britain's

declining cities, meanwhile, the large, often deserted, buildings of the past contained countless subtle visual reminders of the country's imperial history.

In the context of British geopolitical decline, the Second World War took on retrospective importance as a symbol of the greatness the country had once enjoyed. Most politicians had served in the war. The Conservative chair Willie Whitelaw had been a major in a tank brigade. The shadow Home Secretary and advocate of austerity ('monetarist') economics Keith Joseph had been an artillery captain during the war. Prime Minister Edward Heath, notoriously awkward in office and seemingly incapable of expressing emotion, had watched the Nuremberg Trials as a young man and suffered as he realised the scale of the Nazi crimes. Even the pacifist Tony Benn had undergone military service as a young RAF pilot officer. The war was a constant presence on 1970s TV screens, in *Dad's Army*, *Are you Being Served?* and *Coronation Street*, where adversity would be answered with patriotic singsongs and bitter complaints about the younger generation who did not understand the sacrifices the old had made. For Alf Garnett, or for Rigsby in *Rising Damp*, the war was a better Britain to which the worse present day had constantly to be compared.

Yet as the decade went on, the optimism of the war films, the boys' comics and the television documentaries that had been ubiquitous for many years seemed to give way to a darker mood and even a fascination with the defeated enemy. This process of rediscovery was not limited to Britain. One theme of Peter Novick's classic account, *The Holocaust in American Life*, is that the collective memory of the Second World War in the United States was not at its most pressing in 1945 but grew as the 1960s and the 1970s went on, as the Eichmann trial raised awareness of the Holocaust and in response to Israel's 1967 and 1973 wars. For Novick, the moment when the Holocaust moved to the centre of American life was at the end of the 1970s, in a short period which saw the formation of the Simon Wiesenthal Center (1977), an attempted march through the Jewish district of Skokie by partisans of the National Socialist Party of America (also 1977) and the television series *Holocaust*, which was watched by nearly one hundred million Americans in 1978.[3]

A similar account of awareness of the Holocaust in British life would also see the 1970s as the crucial period. For in Britain, as in America, and for decades after the war ended, popular memory of its events downplayed the extent of civilian casualties, including Hitler's Jewish victims. As Tony Kushner has noted, there was 'a prolonged and complex process of understanding [the Holocaust] which is yet to be completed'. The story of the War, as told in Britain, was one of isolation and vindication. The UK was the plucky little nation who had stood alone. The Holocaust came into this narrative through Richard Dimbleby's broadcasts from Bergen-Belsen, showing emaciated but living survivors, rescued from death by heroic British soldiers. Even the name Auschwitz was little known in Britain until the 1970s, as the camp had been liberated by Soviet rather than British troops. Hitler's war against his own people was understood as a process of imprisonment in labour camps and death through overwork, rather than the cold-blooded extermination of millions.[4]

Slowly, a different story was emerging in which the crimes of the Holocaust were acknowledged. The Holocaust made its way into popular consciousness from the 1968 BBC documentary, *Warsaw Ghetto*, and through the success of Judith Kerr's children's novel, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*. As the decade wore on, fascism became an ever more present concern. Luchino Visconti's film *The Damned*, about a family of German industrialists who make peace with the Nazis, was first shown in the UK in winter 1969–1970. The subject of Frederick Forsyth's 1972 best-selling novel *The Odessa File* was a conspiracy of former Nazis travelling between Germany and Argentina. *Cabaret*, starring Liza Minnelli, was released in 1972 and *The Night Porter* in 1974, both films exploring the sexualised appeal of fascism. In John Gardner's 1975 novel, *The Werewolf Trace*, a conspiracy of former Nazis was hiding from capture in England. The following year, Ira Levin's *The Boys from Brazil* returned to the story of Hitler's survivors in South America. Rather than receding into the past, in popular culture the events of the War were becoming more prominent.

Ruining the government's plan

Britain, meanwhile, was poorer than she had been. By 1976, the UK's economy (measured in GDP per capita) had fallen behind not just the US, but Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. The sense of decline was embodied in the rotting wallpaper in *Rising Damp*, in the Czech millionaire DeVere who acquires the stately home in *To the Manor Born*.

A recurring theme of National Front propaganda was that the people of Britain could be protected from hunger and bad housing only if black migrants were repatriated to their or their parents' home countries. The view that 'we' owed no obligation to 'them' was not a minority sentiment, it was the majority view among all generations save for the very young. The inferiority of foreigners was the common sense of the times, reinforced by every paper, every television show. It was the joke dragged out through four seasons of *Mind Your Language*, seven series of *Love Thy Neighbour* and more than fifty episodes of *Till Death Us Do Part*. At times, the idea that 'they' should not be 'here' was stated in violent language; at other times, its expression was agonising or guilty, with the point being made that of course Britain should be more welcoming – just not now, when the country was in such an awful mess. Here is Katherine Fussell, an 'ordinary housewife' writing to *The Times* in 1972:

> [W]e hear of men in all walks of life offered redundancies in place of their work. White and black citizens of this country cannot buy or rent a home easily. Many young folk cannot get married because of the housing problems or if they do they live with in-laws and many marriages fail. Young school leavers, white and black are on the streets with nothing to think about or do . . . Let the government make it clear to these people from any country wanting to come to us, that the immigration quota remains.[5]

The 1972 miners' strike saw power cuts and the introduction of a three-day working week. The miners employed 'flying pickets', workers who rather than merely standing defensively outside their own pit visited adjoining workplaces to bring them out on strike as well. The use of this tactic reached its culmination at the Saltley Coke depot, just a mile outside Birmingham, where up to seven hundred vehicles gathered each day to collect fuel for local businesses. On 7 February 1972, some four hundred Barnsley miners picketed the depot. For four days, the miners sat in the road, blocked the outgoing trucks and wrestled with the police. The miners' leader Arthur Scargill called on Birmingham's engineers for support. That Thursday, the miners were joined by 10,000 supporters from the city chanting 'Close the gates'. Derrick Capper, Chief Constable of Birmingham Police, reluctantly agreed to their demand. Over the following eight days as the papers warned of the danger of blackouts, the government increased its pay offer to 27 per cent, which the jubilant miners accepted.

Events on this scale shaped the activists of the right and their audience. Eight days after Saltley Gate, the future runaway Lord Lucan walked into Hatchards bookshop. His marriage was at an end and he was sick of reading in the press that Britain was on the verge of civil war. He left the shop carrying two books, *Grey Wolf: An Intimate Study of a Dictator* and a copy of *Mein Kampf*.[6]

Edward Heath's government had moved to pre-empt a feared wave of strikes by introducing legislation enabling the courts to sequester the funds of unions which took part in unofficial strike action. His Industrial Relations Act was tested in summer 1972 when dockers protested against containerisation and job losses. The National Industrial Relations Court declared the picketing unlawful and five dockers, the 'Pentonville Five', were jailed. Workers on building sites and in Fleet Street struck in support of the Five. The TUC General Council belatedly voted to join the protests, promising a one-day general strike in support of the dockers. Before this could be held, the Official Solicitor found an excuse to apply for the jailed men's release.

Over the next two years, strikes by rail workers, engineers and others destroyed the remaining apparatus of the Industrial Relations Act.

In response, public figures canvassed the formation of private armies capable of taking over the factories and the power stations in the event of further strikes. Colonel David Stirling, founder of the Special Air Services (SAS), proposed the formation of a private volunteer army, 'GB75'.[7] Junior minister Geoffrey Rippon noted that 'the foundations of our society are being shaken by violence and extremism', and proposed creating a Citizen's Voluntary Reserve.[8]

Part of the Tories' problem was that their leaders were trying to solve too many problems at once. As Prime Minister Heath saw it, he was fighting both inflation and unemployment. When he entered Downing Street in 1970, the number of people out of work had been a troubling 600,000. By November 1970, this had risen to 970,000. Such was the fear of unemployment passing the psychological barrier of one million that demonstrations were called in protest and 20,000 people marched to demand that the government take urgent action. In January 1972, the

one million threshold was crossed for the first time. The *Evening Standard*'s front-page headline carried no words, just '1,023,583'. At Prime Minister's Questions, Labour MP Tom Swain threw the newspaper in disgust at Heath's dispatch box.

Terrified by the prospect of sustained mass unemployment, Edward Heath's government set out a programme of state spending but this in turn aggravated the shortfall between imports and exports. Between September 1972 and September 1973, the price of key manufacturing imports, including cotton, copper and zinc, all rose. This was before the oil shock of late 1973, when oil prices tripled and inflation rose to 16 per cent. Heath's struggle against unemployment provided, against his and his party's intentions, the ideal conditions for labour to flourish. Stable employment put labour at a premium. With prices already rising at double-digit rates, no employer could refuse to pay a cost-of-living pay rise.

The relative increase in the power of labour at the expense of capital was not however universally popular, nor could it have been, for it meant a loss of relative privileges and the diminution of the status of those who did not work or whose wealth was bound up in the ownership of shares or a private pension.

Signs of a backlash against the unions could be seen in the 1971 film *Carry on at Your Convenience* in which the moustachioed villain Vic Spanner refuses to let his men work or allow them any say over union decisions. Two years later, the Strawbs' sarcastic hit, 'Part of the Union' ('So though I'm a working man I can ruin the government's plan') complained that trade unions turned mere workers into something like supermen. The actor Kenneth Williams wrote in his diary, 'What a scourge and a blight is the English working man! What a dishonest, lazy bastard!'[9]

Numerous voices on the right maintained that behind the industrial militancy of the unions stood some kind of Communist conspiracy. As Rigsby put it in *Rising Damp*, 'Don't you know what's behind these strikes? All this political unrest? Russian gold!' Fears of Communist subversion of politics and industry were widely shared, among mainstream Conservatives as well as supporters of the Front:

> John Davies, Heath's former industry minister, told his children that this might be the last Christmas they would be able to enjoy. Heath himself 'relied heavily for advice' on his top civil servant, Sir William Armstrong; by the end of January 1974 Armstrong was talking wildly of coups and coalitions. The head of the CBI tells how, 'We listened to a lecture on how Communists were infiltrating everything. They might even be infiltrating the room he was in.'[10]

Yet the idea of an imminent Labour-Communist insurgency was in every way at odds with the increasingly moderate instincts of both parties. Labour had been elected in 1964 on promises of national renewal; a 'new Britain' could be made in the white heat of what Harold Wilson promised would be a new 'scientific revolution'. Labour was shaped by its defeats in the 1950s and consciously subordinating its cloth-cap electorate in favour of a new potential audience of middle-class voters,

the sort of people who in previous elections might have been tempted to vote for the Liberals. From the mid-1960s onwards, voices could be heard on the left warning that Labour was losing the support of working-class voters who saw the party as too moderate. In 1968, for example, the philosopher Alasdair Macintyre gave a broadcast on BBC radio, listing the ways in which Wilson's government had disappointed its supporters. Labour had become obsessed with the task of conquering inflation. It railed against unofficial strikes. It adopted unemployment as a positive measure to be used to combat wage demands. Labour was silent in face of calls for home rule for Scotland and the party was also increasingly hostile to welfare beneficiaries. These moves needed to be seen as part of a single effort to reorient the Labour Party away from its roots. 'If I am right,' Macintyre mused, 'what we are experiencing [is] not just another swing of the pendulum . . . but a permanent shift of the working class, perhaps not merely away from the Labour Party but even from the electoral system.'[11]

Three years later, Peter Sedgwick, a psychologist and a former activist in the New Left of the 1950s, argued that the institutions of the British left were failing to satisfy their social base and declining in consequence. Sedgwick contrasted the respect with which hundreds of thousands of workers would have viewed Labour MPs as recently as the early 1950s with the contempt that was felt twenty years later. Recalling a march in 1955, when thousands of trade unionists had gathered with their banners outside Parliament to protest against German rearmament, Sedgwick wrote:

> nowadays you would not get a militant lobby like that, simply because very few workers would have enough faith in Parliament to take a day off and come down to London to waste their time and breath. The streets of London are held now less often by workers than by bands of middle-class radical youth, wave after wave of whom has known its brief hour of rebellion, before graduating into private careers and private opinions. The working class cannot graduate.[12]

The Labour Party won the two general elections of 1974. Labour left-wingers Tony Benn and Michael Foot joined the Cabinet, while the TUC was brought into contact with the government. Yet the number of strikes fell, before rallying briefly in winter 1978–1979. Labour reduced spending on public services. As expenditure fell, inequality rose. The period of the Wilson-Callaghan government became a time of sharp popular disillusionment, paving the way for the Conservatives' victory in 1979.

Giving the Marx Memorial Lecture in March 1978, Eric Hobsbawm, historian and leading theoretician of the Communist Party of Great Britain, warned that Britain was changing. For a hundred years, the United Kingdom had been a uniquely proletarian society with very few rural and hardly any white-collar workers but no longer. As recently as 1964, two-thirds of British people had worked in manual occupations; by 1976, this had shrunk to barely half. This proportion,

he warned, would fall further in the years to come. Hobsbawm feared that what he called 'the peculiar structure of British trade unionism' was already proving inadequate to the demise of large manufacturing workplaces, the rise of the public sector and the long-term dependence of millions of people on social security.[13]

The greatest factor in explaining the mood of working-class disenchantment with Labour was the rise in unemployment. As a result of Heath's efforts in 1972–1973, unemployment had fallen to a figure of little more than half a million. It rose again in 1973 but not to its previous level. As late as January 1975, there were still only 678,000 people registered as without work. By the end of the year, however, this number had risen to 1,129,000. Throughout 1976, unemployment remained over a million. In December 1976, the jobless figure was up again to 1,273,000. Such persistent mass unemployment had not been seen in Britain since the 1930s.

At first, Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey let it be known that he planned to reduce unemployment. As late as November 1974, he complained that if the Tories had their way a million people would lose their jobs, a prospect he described as 'morally obscene'. By April 1975, however, inflation was running at 33 per cent, more than five times higher than the equivalent in France, Italy, or West Germany. Healey responded by reinventing himself as a convert to 'monetarism', the ideological weapon of the right within the Conservative Party. Public spending was cut from 46 per cent in 1976 to under 40 per cent two years later. Taxes for the richest were cut from 70 to 65 per cent. Healey insisted that no employer should concede to a pay rise above 4.5 per cent. For the first time in post-war British life, the newspapers began to report instances of profitable companies shedding thousands of employees, such as textile giant Courtaulds, which made 20,000 staff redundant between 1972 and 1975, during three years of repeated record profits.

In July 1978 and in a sharp piece of political opportunism, the Conservatives produced a poster showing a line of the supposed unemployed waiting in a queue (the men and women photographed were in fact well-heeled volunteers from Hendon Young Conservatives) under the headline, 'Labour Isn't Working'. The papers made the image ubiquitous. 'We'd have been drummed out of office', Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher maintained, 'if we'd had this level of unemployment.'[14]

Sarah Cox and Robert Golden described the impact of youth unemployment:

> Young kids feel there is no harm adding to the ugliness around them, school leavers, rejected the adult world of work, vent their frustration on their surroundings. What else is there for them? . . . There is nowhere to go, nothing to do.[15]

Mass redundancies had a catastrophic effect on the labour movement. The places where jobs were lost (larger workplaces, heavy industry, the North) were Labour's strongholds. In winter 1978–1979, Dave Widgery, anti-fascist writer and East End doctor, complained that

> Whole regions of Britain are slipping quietly off the industrial map . . . British Leyland, Dunlop, Triang, Massey Ferguson, Singers, British Shipbuilding have announced major closures. Go to Liverpool or Wigan or Skelmersdale and see the bleakness in the streets and the despair in the faces.[16]

Because you were there

All these processes were the context to the upsurge of racism against migrants that was visible as the decade wore on. The 1970s were not a decade of mass immigration: in every single year except 1979, more people left the UK than settled here. Yet large numbers of British people had still not come to terms with the reality of Commonwealth migration which had begun in 1948 with the arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush* and continued until Labour's Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968. At the end of the Second World War, the white British had been the rulers of the world; now they had to share even their own country with their former subjects. According to the sociologists Robert Miles and Anne Phizacklea, 'New Commonwealth immigrants come from former British colonies, they are the "natives" who were conquered and their arrival in Britain serves to symbolise the decline of the British Empire and current economic ills.'[17] The political psychologist Michael Billig's interviews with supporters of the National Front record their claims that black people had lower intelligence than whites. They thought that Africans and Asians were ungrateful for the gift of empire and incapable of developing their own culture. They maintained that black people were 'taking over' Britain. In the words of two of his sources:

> [I]f we'd left them to it . . . they'd be swinging about the trees, eating coconuts and things and dancing around fires and whatever. Everything that the black man has got he owes to the white man.
>
> It is frightening to think that these strange people should be massing all around you all the time and doing things contrary to your culture . . . and not conforming or anything and not trying to live in peace with us in any way and just sticking in their separate cliques.[18]

At the end of the War, all British subjects (i.e. citizens of the UK or of its colonies) had enjoyed the right to enter and remain in the country. It was not so much the law which prevented the inhabitants of India or Tanzania from moving to London but the time and expense of travel. The *Empire Windrush*'s 1948 journey from Jamaica to London lasted four weeks. But as the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, these practical barriers were reduced. By 1962, the year in which the film *Dr No* showed James Bond flying from London to Jamaica, the journey could be done in just 36 hours.[19]

The entitlement of all British subjects, both black and white, to travel at will remained the position in law until the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962.[20] The 1962 Act was supposed to be a temporary measure which would

last for no more than five years. It distinguished between UK citizens (people born in the UK or with a passport issued in the UK), who were protected from immigration control and Commonwealth citizens (defined by their holding of a passport issued outside the UK) who were not. After 1962, only the former retained the right to remain in Britain. As for the latter, they could travel to and settle in the United Kingdom only if they held employment vouchers from the Ministry of Labour, were students, members of the armed forces, or could support themselves and their dependent without working. The impact of the legislation was also softened to some extent by the terms of various independence treaties, including those which the UK made with Kenya and Uganda, which protected the UK citizenship of the country's white and Asian minorities.

After 1964, Harold Wilson's Labour government sought to deal with the problem of racist hostility to immigrants in two ways. A further Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968 was introduced, converting the temporary 1962 measures into permanent barriers to further immigration. After the 1968 Act, Commonwealth citizens would have the right to enter the UK only if they had a parent or grandparent with British citizenship. This was the 'drawbridge' moment at which mass Commonwealth migration to the UK ended. Yet while immigration policy had been settled along racial lines, the government insisted that no one else in Britain should discriminate. A Race Relations Act was also passed, giving the Race Relations Board powers to act against discrimination in goods, facilities and services.

The demand that black British people, many of whom were 'only' first- or second-generation immigrants, should have equal status with white people struck millions of whites as the most grotesque infringement of *their* rights. This was the theme of Enoch Powell's April 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech. Delivered in Powell's clipped academic tones, coldly, with its author looking pale and clutching at his script, the message was that any laws to protect black people in Britain from racial discrimination would be a gross injustice to the white majority. The Race Relations Act, Powell insisted, would make whites an underclass in their own country: 'The sense of being a persecuted minority which is growing among ordinary English people in the areas of the country which are affected is something that those without direct experience can hardly imagine.'

Speaking to an audience who had been watching over the last two weeks the news from America, where the murder of Martin Luther King had let to riots in a dozen US cities, Powell was not shy of warning of the threat of black militancy: 'That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here.'

In Britain and in America, Powell maintained, when blacks and Asians pretended to ask for equality, they were lying. They were not in search of equal status but rather the creation of a new racial hierarchy where they would enjoy all the privileges which under the British Empire had been reserved for whites alone:

> For these dangerous and divisive elements, the legislation proposed in the Race Relations Bill is the very pabulum they need to flourish. Here is the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organise to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and the ill-informed have provided.

This fear of domination provided the context to Powell's warning of civil unrest: 'As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood".'[21]

The Conservative leader Edward Heath, rightly perceiving Powell's speech as a bid for the leadership of the party, dismissed him from the shadow Cabinet. In the week that followed Enoch Powell's removal, there were several marches in his support and other signs that hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of people agreed with him. Some twenty workplaces, including the Smithfield meat market, witnessed unofficial walkouts in support of Powell. The largest of these racist strikes occurred on the London docks and was led by Harry Pearman, a supporter of the Christian anti-Communist campaign, Moral Rearmament. The strike movement among the dockers spread from the wharves in Poplar to Wapping and from there to Deptford, Southwark and Bermondsey, with perhaps a third of London's 20,000 dockers joining walkouts calling for Powell's reinstatement.[22]

At the time of Powell's speech, Micky Fenn was member of the Communist Party. Fenn describes how, in a fit of desperation, his fellow Marxists suggested that they could disarm the increasing support for racism by calling a mass meeting. The Communists were worried that without outside help they would fail to persuade their fellow workers. Accordingly, they settled on the expedient of inviting two priests, one Anglican and one Catholic, to put a message of universal brotherhood against racism. The dockers were not impressed:

> Danny Lyons, member of the Communist Party . . . called a meeting. It wasn't that well attended – say five, six hundred people. But he got this priest to go forward to the stage. And that was like a fire just going out, embers dying off and someone chucking a can of petrol over it and it blowing up. And my blokes were really, really sick, because they had never had a situation in the dock when anybody came from outside intervening in our affairs. Anyway, it completely flared up and then they said they're going to have a march. It was the only time I felt really ashamed to be a docker and when I watched it on the television I felt really sick, I mean it was disgraceful.[23]

A young Northumbria-born socialist Jim Nichol was working as a full-timer for another left-wing group, the International Socialists. In 1968, he drove IS's one docker Terry Barrett to the same meeting. 'Terry was magnificent,' Nichol recalls:

> he said, 'If you stand with Powell you're standing with the bosses.' Other dockers threw coins at him as he spoke. When the motion was put to a vote, the left got just five votes. Terry sobbed afterwards. It nearly broke the guy.

Another anti-fascist, Dave Widgery, was a medical student at the time of Powell's speech. He happened upon one of the dockers' gatherings outside Parliament and was struck by the quiet dignity with which the dockers waited for their hero, how willing they were to put up with Powell's 'authority and arrogance'. In the days that followed, Widgery was teaching an evening class for young dockers, 'Powell had entered a vacuum. The dockers were already pissed off with Labour. They had no traditional loyalties like their parents. They were fairly cynical about unions but extremely class-conscious. The Left had no influence on them.'[24]

A second moment of racial antagonism occurred in 1972, with the immigration of Asians from Uganda, formerly a British colony, which had been independent only since 1962. Its first leader, Milton Obote, was regarded by the British as insufficiently anti-Soviet and they welcomed his ouster in a 1971 army coup. Obote's replacement Idi Amin was invited on a state visit to Britain and *The Telegraph* described him as a 'staunch friend of Britain'.[25] Yet by 1972, Amin's language had changed and he soon came to be seen as the very embodiment of the type that Powell had warned against, the black leader dominating all around him. In August 1972, Amin instructed his country's 6,000 Asian citizens to leave Uganda within ninety days. But they were British passport holders. Edward Heath and his ministers were horrified at the prospect of allowing in such a number of migrants. Heath's special envoy Geoffrey Rippon offered the Asians £2,000 (later reduced to £750) if they would renounce their British passports. But the offer received few takers. Amin brought the discussion repeatedly back to his country's colonial past, telling journalists, 'This is British imperialism. I am not going to listen to imperialist advice.' There was a protest march against the Ugandan Asians by Smithfield meat porters. Leicester's Labour council took out advertisements in Ugandan newspapers warning that the city was 'virtually full'. Enoch Powell claimed that elderly of Britain were living in 'actual physical fear' at the prospect of the Ugandan Asians' arrival. Such views did not make Powell unpopular. Both in 1972 and 1973, BBC viewers voted him their Man of the Year.[26]

The ultimate significance of Powell was not, however, his championing of these views but his inability to win over the Conservative Party to a policy of anti-migrant hostility. From Powell's failure, still more strident voices would emerge.

Notes

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2

A HISTORY OF COUPS AND EXPULSIONS

The National Front was founded in 1967 following a year of discussions between three right-wing groups: A. K. Chesterton's League of Empire Loyalists (LEL), John Bean and Andrew Fountaine's British National Party (BNP) and the Racial Preservation Society (RPS). All three stood at different points on the spectrum between the fascist and the non-fascist far-right. The LEL had existed since 1954 as a ginger group within the Conservative Party, mocking the Conservatives' leaders for their willingness to give up British imperial territory. The British National Party had been a militaristic and pro-Nazi movement. Yet in 1964, the BNP had experimented with standing candidates in elections and had won 9 per cent of the vote in that year's general election in Southall.[1] The BNP was, in other words, a fascist group seriously considering going over to electoralism. The Racial Preservation Society was the third player in the discussions – a confederation of anti-immigrant campaigns, some of whose members were to join the Front while others gravitated towards smaller groups on the right.[2]

Oswald Mosley and the English voodoo

The prominence of these three groups within the British right was down, in part, to the failure of other previously better-known figures. At the end of the Second World War, by far the most important figure on the extra-parliamentary right had been Oswald Mosley. Not yet fifty at the war's end, Mosley was still tall and lean and his eyes retained something of their old piercing character. Deep into the 1950s and 1960s, Mosley kept the support of thousands of former supporters of the British Union of Fascists, not least the 813 men and women who had been detained during the war under Defence Regulation 18B as potential traitors. Radicalised by the experience, bitter and resentful, this generation of fascists enjoyed a first recovery during the autumn of 1947 when anti-Jewish riots in

Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester were followed by weeks of meetings by pro-Mosley groups. The largest, at Ridley Road in Dalston, brought audiences of up to 3,000 to hear Mosley speak.[3] Yet while stray individuals in the younger generation were making their way towards fascism, more were moving in the opposite direction. Mosley's meetings saw counter-protests by anti-fascists, principally from the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Jewish ex-servicemen of the 43 Group. The fascists' platforms were knocked over, their marches disrupted and even Oswald Mosley himself was unable to find an audience. 'England', he complained in 1947, 'has been turned into an Island Prison . . . No man may start a crusade from within a gaol.'[4]

Mosley set up a new party, the Union Movement, with a programme: 'Europe a Nation'. His idea was the former fascist powers of Germany and Italy should be treated as allies and that Europe should form an economic combine to exploit a series of colonies throughout Africa.[5] In the 1950s, the Mosleyites campaigned against decolonisation, complaining that 'one vast territory after another has been abandoned in Africa', condemning the 'Black nationalism' of the continent's new rulers and demanding that British make peace with Rhodesia.[6] It was in these terms that Martin Moloney of the Union Movement addressed a meeting at Kensington Town Hall in 1969, 'We'll not hand over our country to Black Power, student power or any other power. If it were not for white civilisation in Africa, they'd still be eating each other.'[7]

Save for the Notting Hill riots in 1958, when groups of white youths equipped with iron bars, leather belts and butchers' knives rioted against the black inhabitants of North Kensington (trouble for which Mosley's supporters were widely blamed),[8] the Union Movement was a declining force on the right. Mosley won 2,821 votes at Kensington North in 1959, but a mere 1,126 at Shoreditch and Finsbury seven years later. He attempted to hold a rally at Trafalgar Square in 1962 but the meeting was disrupted by Mosley's opponents. His supporters found themselves having to write with bravado to their ageing comrades, 'When we are attacked very hard it means that our progress is good . . . The enemy fire at the living not the dead.'[9] Two years later, the American political scientist George Thayer interviewed Mosley, finding him sensitive to slights and wracked by self-doubt: 'He seemed resigned to his ostracism; the pride with which he once carried it has worn thin.'[10]

The initiative passed to others, in particular A. K. Chesterton. Born in 1899 at the Luipaardsvlei gold mine outside Johannesburg, Chesterton had arrived in Britain as an immigrant before 1914. He was a Mosleyite in the 1930s and his leader's biographer, before being dismissed in 1938 when Mosley was short of funds. Despite their falling-out, Chesterton never broke with Mosley's anti-Semitism. Spoiled, authoritarian in his private relations and dependent on a quick-fire succession of eulogised and then despised mentors, Chesterton's allies included Catholic Tory MP Christopher Hollis and Douglas Reed, the novelist and anti-Semite.[11] After 1945, he was a leader writer for the right-wing but non-fascist magazine *Truth*, a literary advisor to Lord Beaverbrook, the owner of the

Sunday Express, and the ghost-writer of Beaverbrook's memoirs. In 1953, *Truth* was taken over by new owners, the Staples Press. Chesterton's response was to launch a rival paper, *Candour*, which won the backing of expatriate British multi-millionaire Robert Jeffery, who lived in Chile and had made his fortune out of manufacturing fertilisers.[12] Over the next seven years, Jeffery lavished tens of thousands of pounds on Chesterton's schemes.

In 1954, Chesterton launched a new campaign, the League of Empire Loyalists. As its name indicates, this was first of all a movement against the loss of Britain's colonial possessions. Some of the League's character can be seen from the members of its General Council, which included the Earls of Buchan and Norbury, Baron Ironside of Archangel, Lieutenant General Sir Balfour Oliphant Hutchison and Air Commodore G. S. Oddie. This was a movement of the old rather than the young and of men with social power. Several future leaders of the Front were to pass through the League, including John Bean, John Tyndall and Martin Webster.

The League of Empire Loyalists was best known for actions intended to embarrass their opponents and win the group publicity. In October 1955, LEL supporters forced their way into a United Nations Day event at Trafalgar Square, pulling down the UN flag and trampling on it. At a Tory rally in Bradford in January 1956, Prime Minister Anthony Eden was interrupted by the League's Leslie Greene, who approached him on the platform before shouting that the British Empire was the greatest force for peace the world had known and Eden was throwing it away.[13] John Bean joined the League in 1955, becoming its Northern organiser. In June 1956, he disrupted a speech by Anthony Eden, handing Eden a black coal scuttle.

In October 1958, the League's support was at its peak with a claimed membership of 3,000. Not for the first time, the League sent supporters into the Conservative Party conference. On this occasion, however, they were expected. Heckling Prime Minister Macmillan's speech, blowing the first bars of the Retreat on a bugle and shouting that Britain's empire had been betrayed, they were struck by stewards and forcibly ejected. Criticised in the press and abandoned by many of its former supporters, the League found itself short of allies and funds.

The most important loss was that of R. K. Jeffery, who died in April 1961. He had promised to leave everything he owned, worth around a million pounds, to A. K. Chesterton. To the Loyalists' despair, however, there was a deathbed reconciliation between Jeffery and Maria Elba Smith, Jeffrey's illegitimate daughter. Not one further penny of Jeffery's fortune made its way to the League.

The Loyalists' twelfth AGM was held in 1965. A. K. Chesterton was ill and declined to attend. Just fifty people were present. 'Like an army too long in the battlefield,' write the group's historians Hugh McNeile and Rob Black, 'the League had gradually lost the edge of its fighting spirit.'[14]

It was the League's decline that provided the context to the merger discussions on the right in 1966–1967. Groups such as the British National Party saw that the Loyalists were well-funded and believed that they had significant reserves. Chesterton concealed from his allies the events of Jeffery's death and kept open the possibility that the League might at any time come into a massive windfall.

Just a year after its formation, the National Front was provided with a first opportunity for growth. Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech was met with widespread approval in the press. The day after the speech, Smithfield's meat porters struck in support of Powell. They were led by Dan Harmston, who had stood for election two years before as a Mosley supporter in South Islington.[15] Soon Harmston's supporters were handing out anti-immigration leaflets at the docks. In the immediate aftermath of Powell's speech, Chesterton was interviewed in *The Times*, 'What Mr Powell has said does not vary in any way from our view.'[16] That December, supporters of the NF marched to Powell's home to declare their support for him.[17]

According to Robert Taylor, a National Front organiser in Yorkshire

> We held a march in Huddersfield in support of what Powell had said and we signed eight people up as members of the branch that afternoon. Powell's speeches gave our membership and morale a tremendous boost. Before Powell spoke, we were getting only cranks and perverts. After his speeches, we started to attract, in a secret sort of way, the right-wing members of the Tory organisations.[18]

Taylor's emphasis on Conservative organisations hints at a key issue for the Front. Disenchanted Powellites were the group's best potential source of recruits, bringing money and electoral expertise. Yet if such Tories were to join the Front, they would find a party staffed by long-term supporters of British fascism. Plainly, there was every danger that the Conservatives would be put off as soon as they joined.

This risk had been discussed before the Front was even launched. During the merger discussions that led to the NF's formation, A. K. Chesterton of the LEL and Andrew Fountaine and John Bean of the BNP agreed that they would exclude the two people on the right who they judged had the worst record of arguing for Hitlerism: John Tyndall and Colin Jordan.[19] Jenny Doyle, a member of the Racial Preservation Society at the time of the Front's formation was later to recall a meeting in 1966 at which one of Tyndall's supporters, Paul Trevelyan, had attempted to persuade the other participants in the merger discussions to change their mind and allow Tyndall to join:

> Discussion was brief, five or ten minutes and voted upon. Seventeen others supported my motion that John Tyndall be excluded. Two voters [were] for [Tyndall's admission] and two abstained. At the very foundation of the National Front, the founders of the Party voted that they didn't want John Tyndall . . . at any price.[20]

Given that Tyndall was later allowed to join the Front and was for many years its chairman, it is worth explaining why people who had worked with him before were unwilling to do so again and why the decision to exclude him broke down.

The loved and hated leader

John Tyndall came from a Protestant family in Ireland. His grandfather had been a policeman in the Royal Irish Constabulary fighting the rising forces of Irish Republicanism. Tyndall's father grew up in the same country before coming to England where he worked as a policeman in Peckham and then as an administrator for the YMCA. He had, according to his son's unsympathetic account, a 'vaguely idealistic faith in the ability of the nations and races of the world to come together in such international organisations'.[21] John Tyndall spent his National Service with the Royal Horse Artillery in Germany between 1952 and 1954, where he became fascinated by the defeated Nazi regime. Later, he worked as an accountant. A short man with a hard, humourless face and thinning hair, Tyndall's style was all about conveying an impression of strength. His handshake was over-firm and his conversation grimly serious.[22] His speeches were delivered in a plummy iambic pentameter, modelled rather too closely on the platform style of Oswald Mosley.[23]

After a short period in Chesterton's League of Empire Loyalists, by 1960 Tyndall was a prominent member of the UK's small neo-Nazi subculture. He and Colin Jordan worked together in a para-military group, Spearhead, whose members wore Brownshirt-style uniforms and practised arms training. In August 1962, the police raided a Spearhead camp in Gloucestershire which had been addressed by the American neo-Nazi Lincoln Rockwell. They found a jar of poison labelled 'Jew killer' and enough explosives to manufacture over a hundred hand grenades.[24]

The alliance between Tyndall and Jordan broke in 1963 over Jordan's wedding to the perfume heiress Françoise Dior, an event the couple celebrated by cutting their wedding-ring fingers and letting the drops fall on a virgin copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.[25] In the 1970s (by which time Tyndall was the leader of the Front and Jordan of its main rival, the British Movement), the most common image to appear in anti-fascist publications was a photograph of Tyndall dressed in his old Spearhead uniform.

At Front events, it was Tyndall's name that the crowd chanted. And yet he was far from popular with those who worked most closely with him. A letter later sent by Tyndall to Ray Hill (a *Searchlight* mole in the British Movement) suggests that Tyndall was aware of the way in which he polarised his supporters:

> I have many enemies in the camp of nationalism. Some simply hate me because my achievement is greater than that of any other post-war nationalist leader and jealousy in politics is just as corrosive as it is in the world of opera singers, ballerinas or chorus girls . . . Others hate me because I am a rather uncompromising personality, not always best equipped to engage in the game of cajolery and flattery that seems to be part of the political art.[26]

The character of Tyndall's politics in the mid-1960s can be seen in early issues of *Spearhead*, the magazine which he controlled and would bring with him to the Front. The magazine featured openly neo-Nazi messages, cartoons of the

right's Jewish opponents and demands to make every man 'Jew-wise'[27] and Britain 'Jew-clean'.[28] There were repeated Germanisms; Britain was urged to become a 'volksgemeinschaft of the Anglo-Saxons – within an Anglo-Saxon Reich'.[29] Even the magazine's title *Spearhead* was printed in a 1930s-style German gothic script.

In 1967, Tyndall was convicted of carrying firearms.[30] His release coincided with the merger discussions that led to the formation of the Front. In response to them, Tyndall attempted to tone down *Spearhead*'s politics: the magazine's mast-head changed, the references to Hitler became fewer and more muted.

One former ally who argued for Tyndall's exclusion from the National Front was John Bean. He complained that Tyndall was a neo-Nazi revivalist, obsessed with the swastikas and uniforms of National Socialism. In the early 1960s, Bean had been arrested by the police and fined for driving around London in a van with posters demanding the release of Adolf Eichmann, one of the organisers of the Holocaust, who was now on trial in Jerusalem. Bean maintains that Colin Jordan and John Tyndall directed him to drive the van outside a hall in London where Jewish survivors were commemorating the Warsaw ghetto. According to Bean:

> For several years after this incident I had a recurring dream, more of a nightmare, where I was driving an open lorry through the streets of an unrecognisable city. People walking by would stare at me and turn their backs. I turned my head to see what was on the back of the lorry. I saw that it was full of emaciated corpses dressed in concentration camp clothes.

For years, Bean would chastise himself for having allowed (in his words) the 'emotion of a bad taste, sickening, sixth-form prank . . . to dominate the intellect'.[31]

Others involved in the discussions were also sceptical about John Tyndall. For the Front's first chairman A. K. Chesterton, the new party was intended to be an 'elite' rather than a popular group – a party open to Tory grandees who just wanted to protest against their leaders and bring them back on track. Chesterton wrote in his magazine *Candour* that 'If the NF does not become an elite movement it will fail.'[32] Tyndall and his generation were in Chesterton's mind when the latter warned at the Front's first 1967 Conference of

> certain kinds of louts who, unless kept in check, can and certainly will wreck any movement . . . The man who thinks this a war that can be won by mouthing slogans about 'dirty Jews and filthy niggers' is a maniac whose place should not be in the National Front but a mental hospital.[33]

While Tyndall saw himself as principled and victim of his own consistency, during the crucial 1966–1967 negotiations his behaviour conveys the opposite impression. In a 1966 pamphlet, 'Six Principles of British Nationalism', Tyndall accepted that nationalists should stand for election and that the imagined nationalist future could come about only through democratic means. This move was intended to persuade the likes of Bean and Chesterton of his willingness to engage with their

new project. It succeeded; while Tyndall himself was excluded from the Front in the group's first year, his supporters were allowed to join. Behind the scenes, moreover, Tyndall was telling his international contacts that his politics remained the same as they had always been. In March 1967, in a letter to the US neo-Nazi William Pierce, Tyndall characterised Chesterton's followers as a 'liberal element' and promised that his supporters, 'the National Socialist faction', would capture the Front.[34]

Kicking their way into the headlines

While all these internal intrigues were taking place, the National Front faced a further difficulty, which was how to maintain press interest in its activities. 'The Front badly want publicity', noted Sally Beauman of the *Sunday Telegraph* after one interview, they

> will dismiss all journalists as liberals . . . On the other hand, they seem fascinated by them; they know their names, the life histories of those few journalists who have reported their activities – they want to know if you know them too: they want to gossip about them.[35]

The Front's leaders were aware of their isolation and impatient with it. They believed that their politics was capable of acquiring majority support. The more time that their party spent in the headlines, the better.

When immigration was in the news, as it was in spring 1968, journalists rushed to interview the NF's leaders. At other times, the papers ignored the Front. Such leaders as A. K. Chesterton sought to raise the visibility of their organisation by copying the tactics of the League of Empire Loyalists, going to the meetings of other groups and heckling the speakers. Over time, this approach would morph into chanting, cat-calling and attempts to close down the meetings of its left-wing opponents. The development was not, however, immediate. Press reports from 1970 and 1971 include accounts of NF supporters attending Fabian meetings in Colchester and heckling the speaker,[36] picketing the offices of Prime Minister Edward Heath and accusing him of treason,[37] or standing with anti-Communist placards outside a Sunday service given by Blackheath vicar Paul Osterreicher.[38] The National Front targeted the various community relations officers, appointed by local authorities to give effect to their duties under the Race Relations Act. In Luton, they heckled the local officer, Leslie Scafe,[39] and similar tactics were attempted elsewhere.

According to John Bean, there was a slow, cumulative, process in which heckling (a legitimate tactic and far from the sole preserve of the extreme right) was replaced by violent attacks on opponents: 'Week after week from 1969 to late 1973 teams of NF activists, first twenty, then forty, then sixty and eventually hundreds strong, would infiltrate and rowdily lambast every left-wing meeting in London.'[40] Bean's account is exaggerated; the National Front did not have enough supporters to attack

every meeting in London. But these attacks are a matter of record and on occasion had high-profile targets. A speech in Newham by senior Labour MP Roy Jenkins, who as Home Secretary had overseen the introduction of the Race Relations Act, saw National Front supporters bussed in from Manchester pelting Jenkins with flour bombs, bags of soot, ash and even manure. Jenkins was attacked again when delivering another speech in Chichester. So was the anti-apartheid activist Peter Hain when he addressed a meeting in Hemel Hempstead on Rhodesia.[41]

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, the Front also began to experiment with calling street demonstrations, a tactic which Chesterton had always criticised. The Front's first chairman had a particular objection to chanting, which seemed to him to epitomise the old mob politics that he associated with Mosley.

One procession which Chesterton did not block was the National Front's Remembrance Day procession, during which the Front marched through central London, ending with speeches in Lincoln's Inn Fields. This event was held in support of white Rhodesia. The marches were led off by a flag party and pipe band, with Union Jacks and the flags of Rhodesia and South Africa much in evidence. Former servicemen were encouraged to march, showing off their decorations. These displays were intended to present the Front as part of the mainstream of British public opinion.

After three years as chairman, Chesterton resigned, saying that his health required him to live half the year in South Africa and an active role was beyond him. Tyndall's ally Martin Webster, a former member of the LEL and GBM, had already been appointed as the Front's National Activities Organiser and was able to facilitate Tyndall's rise. Like his mentor John Tyndall, Webster was a polarising figure on the right. Other nationalists gossiped about his weight, his sexuality, the money he had inherited at a young age. On Chesterton's resignation, Tyndall was promoted to vice-chairman of the NF. By 1972, John Tyndall was the Front's chairman – its leader.

Opportunities, modernisation

Tyndall's capture of the position of chairman in 1972 was followed soon afterwards by the Conservative government's muted acceptance of migration to Britain by the Ugandan Asians expelled by Idi Amin. *Guardian* journalist Martin Walker describes Amin as 'the best recruiting officer the NF ever had'.[42] The Front organised a picket of Downing Street. Over the next ten days, NF supporters were able to spark a walkout by the Smithfield meat porters, echoing the protests in support of Powell in 1968. The group's members also picketed Manchester and Heathrow airports where, in the recollection of one new arrival, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, the Ugandan Asians were met by 'lines of "patriots" with obscene placards . . . mothers with buggies, East End butchers, miners, the National Front'.[43] On 16 September, the Conservatives' Monday Club held a rally on Uganda at Central Hall. The Front attended the rally, took it over and directed those participating to march on Downing Street.[44] Through winter 1972–1973, the membership of the Front

doubled, reaching its peak of 17,500 the following summer. Council elections in Blackburn in 1973 saw NF candidates winning 18 and 23 per cent of the vote. At a parliamentary by-election in West Bromwich in May 1973, Martin Webster won 16 per cent. John Tyndall, as NF chairman, claimed credit for the victory.

The Front's relationship with the Monday Club had been a matter of press speculation for years. Formed in 1961, from 1965 the Club had been trying to build itself as a mass membership organisation and in that year, it removed the requirement for its members to be Conservatives. In 1965, the Monday Club supported racist Rhodesia against the policy of its own party, which declined to recognise Rhodesia's independence. As early as 1967, mainstream Conservatives were warning that the Monday Club was acting as a bridge between Conservatives and the extreme right and asking their party to take action. In 1968, Enoch Powell was the guest of honour at the Monday Club's dinner. The following year, the Monday Club published a pamphlet by George K. Young, *Who Goes Home?* It demanded the repatriation of Commonwealth migrants.[45] After the 1970 election, thirty-five of Heath's MPs were members of the Monday Club. Numerous local supporters of the Club, however, had links to fascism. They included John Ormowe who told an undercover *Mirror* journalist in 1971 that he was an admirer of Hitler, 'If you read *Mein Kampf*, you will see it has been wrongly derided', and a young Neil Hamilton, who attended the 1972 Conference of the neo-fascist MSI in Italy, with his airfare and expenses paid for by that party.[46]

At times the Front welcomed the existence of the Monday Club and sought to work with it; at other times it deprecated the Club as over-moderate. In February 1973, John Tyndall addressed a Monday Club meeting at Chelmsford.[47] By now, the Club was coming under scrutiny from Conservative headquarters. The Club's chairman, Jonathan Guinness, was both Oswald Mosley's stepson and an ambitious politician with his own hopes of making it to Parliament. In March 1973, Guinness stood for the Conservatives at a by-election in Lincoln, suffering a 20 per cent swing to the winning candidate Dick Taverne. Re-elected chairman of the Monday Club in April 1973, Guinness pledged to exclude the Front's supporters. In June, he expelled Len Lambert, the man who had given Tyndall a platform in Essex. Over the next six months, a battle waged for control of the Club, with its Provincial Council opposing Lambert's removal and a special general meeting voting by 236 to 54 to demand the resignation of Guinness. However, the Club's chairman remained in place and the remaining NF supporters left, including the key figure of Roy Painter.[48]

Tyndall understood that the Front needed to modernise if it was to appeal to supporters of the Monday Club and other Conservatives. He was equally determined that this process should not change the NF's basic character. The equivocal nature of his programme of renewal can be seen from *Spearhead*, the magazine which Tyndall took with him from the GBM and became the voice of the Front's leadership. *Spearhead*'s racism remained consistent; its fascism, however, became muted. The magazine told the members of the Front to change. Yet this task was posed as a question of presentation rather than belief. In one 'Message from the

Chairman of the National Front', Tyndall warned the Front's members against 'surround[ing] themselves with obscurantist regalia, tap[ping] the sides of their armchairs to martial music and defer[ring] to political leaders of a bygone age'. The Front, he argued, had to find a middle path between populism and militancy:

> Just as there exist within some of us yearnings for greater 'moderation' and 'respectability,' there exist within some others of us yearnings – at least at moments – for greater militancy; an even more uncompromising enunciation of our policies and even more aggressive methods of promoting our party and opposing its enemies.

In the place of such old-style politics, members were invited to engage in 'practical, business-like political activity' while 'not sacrificing the strength of their inner convictions'.[49]

The Front insisted that it was not a fascist party; it had, however, no consistent alternative to fascism. *Spearhead* defended Tyndall from accusations that he was a Hitler supporter. This allegation was characterised as 'the lowest depths of gutter journalism' and Tyndall was said to be 'critical of certain of Hitler's policies, particularly his foreign policy'.[50] In another piece, Tyndall acknowledged that 'The "Nazi" label is the most widely employed smear weapon of our enemy.' He went on to identify the Front with Hitler's economic and social policies and with territorial expansion. Unlike in Germany under Hitler, he continued, the Front could achieve the same goals peacefully, without needing dictatorship or racial war. Britain could rebuild her African empire by negotiation: 'a policy whereby Britain and her partners use their combined assets . . . for common advantage'.[51]

The National Front's presence was felt in several workplaces. In October 1972, there was a strike by Asian bar loaders at Mansfield Hosiery in Loughborough, in protest against racist recruitment policies which restricted black employees to the least skilled and worst paid work. Among the strikers' principal opponents was the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers (NUHKW) which accepted the workers' subscriptions but had no local branch and supported the existing allocation of labour and the exclusion of Asians from better-paid roles. The Race Relations Board found that the union was collaborating with management to restrict Asian workers to worse pay. Indeed, such was the frustration of black workers that they decided to occupy the union's offices. The Front offered its support to white workers who did not support the principle of equal pay. Ken Sanders, a member of the NUHKW at Mansfield Hosiery, joined the Front and later stood as an NF parliamentary candidate.[52]

Two years later, the National Front responded to a strike by around five hundred Asian workers demanding equal conditions at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester by seeking to organise the white workers as strike-breakers. Again, the key grievance was the restriction of the best-paid manual roles (setters) to whites. As one Asian striker complained:

> Every morning when we come to work . . . white women push past us and clock in first . . . The setters set the white women's machine first . . . White women also get the jobs of their choice. We have to do what the setter gives us.

The TGWU refused to make the dispute official or pay strike pay and denounced all outsiders in equal terms, whether they were helping the workers or, like the Front, the bosses. The Front leaked management proposals to settle the strike, helping to undermine any prospect of settlement. It called a march through Leicester behind a banner, 'White workers of Imperial Typewriters', to demand that the company stand firm. The strike ended in the closure of the company's Leicester and Hull factories.[53] A foreman at Imperial Typewriters Tony Cartwright stood for the National Front in the October 1974 general election at Leicester South.

An anti-fascist mole attending a National Front meeting at the 'Shakespeare' pub in central Birmingham records the local group as engrossed with the idea of emulating perceived Communist success in infiltrating the unions:

> Tom Finnegan gave a report on the proposed bulletins for various areas – displaying a map with several hundred coloured pins on it he outlined how things would be done – the communist cell system would be applied with several people in each branch covering a set number of members . . . John Finnegan then took up the question of trades unions and said that NF members must gain union posts. Communist training classes were referred to and possible emulation commented on.[54]

While several of the Front's older members were lifelong fascists moving slowly in the direction of electoralism, its young recruits relished the violence and wanted to push Tyndall to the right. One was Joe Pearce, who joined the Front when he was just 14 years old. The product of a rural Suffolk upbringing who had moved to East London and then rejected his new comprehensive school, Pearce established a Young National Front magazine: *Bulldog*. 'It would be true', Pearce would acknowledge decades later, 'that *Bulldog*'s ultimate purpose was to incite racial hatred.'[55]

The left-libertarian paper *Big Flame* interviewed an anti-fascist who had grown up in Wolverhampton and had supported Enoch Powell:

> Just like lots of lads and girls, racism was attractive to me, in that it meant you could rebel against the system with the implicit support of your family . . . But the real clincher for why I became a firm Powellite was the reaction of the middle-class, whose abstract, liberal tolerance was totally irrelevant, ill-informed and patronising.

He could remember vividly

> a TV discussion following on a documentary about racism in Wolverhampton in which a Hampstead do-gooder said, 'To be terribly frank, one finds the speech of the white people in Wolverhampton quite as alien as that of the ethnic minority.'

Any effective anti-racism had to break through the link that could sometimes bind racism with elements of class feeling. 'I still get creeps', the former Powell supporter wrote:

> when I hear that 'One race, the human race' line, because it allows the NF to manipulate the germ of class-consciousness in a racist direction. That's why they try to nail the revolutionary left as 'nigger lovers', students and 'do-gooders'.[56]

The future actor Ricky Tomlinson briefly joined the National Front in Liverpool. 'I was politically naive and poorly educated,' he remembers. 'I had a mixture of left- and right-wing views, having been a shop steward and at the same time coming from a very patriotic family.' The Front presented itself as a single-issue anti-immigration campaign: 'I just wanted to draw the line under how many we could take because there didn't seem to be enough to go round.'[57]

'Members and supporters are attracted predominantly by the National Front's stand on immigration,' wrote Zig Layton Henry, 'and for this reason this is the issue which dominates NF campaigns and publicity.' Harrop suggested that as many as three-quarters of all new recruits to the National Front joined out of racism. Indeed, the Front was happy to claim the mantle of white prejudice. In one interview, its National Organiser Martin Webster told the BBC:

> The reason why we publish a poster saying 'The National Front is a Racialist Front' is because we *are* a racialist front. You must understand what that means. It means that we support the concept of the nation as the means whereby our society is to be organised and we believe the only rational basis for having nations is some kind of a degree of ethnic homogeneity.

The interviewer asked what would happen to those outside that ethnic homogeneity. 'Well you won't have any rights at all,' Webster answered, 'because you won't be a citizen of the nation, because you won't be part of the community.'[58] In this exchange, what is striking is how Webster was using racism dynamically, both to win new supporters and to give them a sense of the Front's whole programme. In just a few words, he was explaining how the Front stood for more than hostility to migration. It demanded repatriation and a racially homogenous Britain.

Red Lion Square

One consequence of the shift from Chesterton's leadership to Tyndall was that the National Front ceased to rely on a routine of monthly private members' meetings combined with sporadic election campaigns and began to use public demonstrations to recruit. Under Chesterton, marches had been limited to the annual Remembrance Day parade. Under Tyndall, the number of demonstrations increased rapidly. Chairman Tyndall justified the new visibility of his party on the streets:

> What is it that touches off a chord in the instincts of the people to whom we are seeking to appeal? It can often be the most simple and primitive thing. Rather than a speech or printed article it may just be a flag; it may be a marching column; it may just be the sound of a drum; it may just be a banner or it may just be the impression of a crowd. None of these things contain themselves one simple argument, one simple piece of logic . . . They are recognised as being among the things that appeal to the hidden forces of the human soul.[59]

On 15 June 1974, clashes between anti-fascists and the police at London's Red Lion Square culminated in a police charge against anti-fascist demonstrators. One anti-Front protester, Kevin Gateley, a student at Warwick University, died.[60] He was the first person to be killed at a political protest in mainland Britain since 1919. The context to the events began in April, when the Front booked the large hall at Conway Hall, a venue historically associated with secular humanism and the anti-war left. In early June, the anti-imperialist and anti-racist campaign group Liberation, headed by veteran Labour MP Fenner Brockway, learned of the Front's booking and attempted to book a room of their own elsewhere in the building. By 9 June, the police were aware that both the Front and its opponents planned to hold demonstrations culminating at Conway Hall. The owners of Conway Hall, the South Place Ethical Society, through their General Secretary Peter Cadogan, released a press statement defending the decision to allow the Front a room on free speech grounds.

There were two demonstrations on 15 June. A Front contingent, about nine hundred-strong, formed up at Tothill Street in central London and approached Red Lion Square from the south-west. They were held by the police and made to wait at the corner of Vernon Place and Southampton Row, about a hundred metres due west of the north-west corner of Red Lion Square. Meanwhile, 1,500 or so Liberation marchers approached Red Lion Square from the north-east.

In a later report, Lord Justice Scarman estimated that within the anti-fascist crowd there were about four hundred to five hundred supporters of the International Marxist Group, a smaller number of International Socialists and about forty to fifty supporters of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist). The front of the demonstration marched from east to west along Theobalds Road and turned left

down Old North Street where it approached Red Lion Square from the north. The organisers had reached an agreement with the police that on arriving at the Square the anti-fascists would be permitted to turn left and march clockwise around the eastern edge of Red Lion Square. They would pass Conway Hall, in the square's north-east corner and settle in the south-east corner where they would hold a static protest. On arriving at Red Lion Square, it was made clear however to the organisers that the police had changed their minds and would permit a public protest only in the north-west corner of the square, that is, at a much greater distance from the Front meeting. The police therefore instructed the demonstrators to turn right, away from Conway Hall. The Liberation organisers agreed to this re-routing of their protest and about five hundred people followed. The rest of the marchers, however, remained where they were.

As for what happened next, there are two main versions. The first is the account given by police officers to the subsequent Scarman Inquiry. They reported that forty or so Maoists behind a red CPE (M-L)[61] banner briefly pushed towards the police line on the north side of the square. In response, the officer in charge, Deputy Assistant Commissioner J. H. Gerrard, ordered his officers to clear all remaining anti-fascists from the northward edge of Red Lion Square. This decision required the police to split the anti-fascist group in two: the Liberation contingent were allowed their meeting in the square's north-west corner; the remaining anti-fascist were to be expelled from the square northward, leaving the area around Conway Hall free for the National Front to hold their meeting. In this account, it was as the demonstrators were being expelled from the square that Kevin Gateley was killed.

The other version of events is the one found by Lord Scarman. In his account, the Maoists were ignored in favour of members of the IMG ('a front of determined-looking young men with their arms linked') who had refused to follow the Liberation organisers and led instead what Scarman termed 'a pushing affair – the weight of a small number of demonstrators' against police lines. This tentative push, Scarman found, grew in force, even though the numbers involved were still tiny, becoming at first a 'vicious scrimmage', then an 'unexpected, unprovoked and viciously violent' assault, and in its final stages a 'riot', to which it was the police's 'duty' to respond with unrestrained force.[62] To a greater extent even than the police themselves, Scarman was able to blame Gateley's death not on the officers who struck him but on the IMG whose failure to disperse was (for Scarman) the cause of Gateley's death.

At forty years' distance, some of Scarman's findings just about ring true. The measures of linking arms *was* a recurring anti-fascist tactic, which had travelled to Britain via the IMG from Paris. The suggestion that a couple of dozen protesters may have pushed at police lines is plausible; the police were, after all, blocking the agreed route to Conway Hall. At demonstrations, it is far from unusual for police pushes to be resisted and for something like a 'scrimmage' (i.e. a rugby scrum) to follow between protesters and the police. Members of the IMG, a party which in its subsequent history was never at the militant wing of anti-fascism, may well have seen the CPE (M-L) and may have pushed in the same direction as them. Even if

we accept that they pushed as hard as they could while still linking arms (Scarman's 'vicious scrimmage'), this is no force at all. Anyone who has attended more than a handful of protests will have seen desultory pushing of this sort; the reason why Red Lion Square is remembered is not because of this push but because of the police response, which was to escalate the conflict by charging at the crowd with batons drawn.

The police repeatedly drove into the anti-fascist crowd. Photographs from the day show mounted police striking at the heads of demonstrators with sticks. Nick Mullen, a 28-year-old student from an Irish family was one of those struck on the head. He had been on Old North Street at the same time as Kevin Gateley and a picture shows Mullen's face thick with blood. In Mullen's account, the fatal conflict began when the policemen on foot received an order to attack, causing them to lift their batons. One demonstrator called out, 'Why don't you put your truncheons away?' To which a policeman answered, 'You must be fucking joking.' There was a push and one of the demonstrators fell. Mullen claims to have heard a policeman shout, 'One of the bastards is down. Let's trample him.'[63]

The last photographs before Gateley suffered the blow that killed him show the student at the junction of Red Lion Square and Old North Street with his way seemingly blocked by police officers. Between Gateley and Conway Hall, there are mounted policemen, riding their horses into the crowd. Gateley is three rows back from them, facing mounted officers to his front and police on foot to his side. Subsequent photographs show Gateley after he collapsed. Officers reached for Gateley's unconscious body and lifted his foot before it fell weightless to the ground.

The post-mortem was conducted by Dr Iain West of St Thomas's Hospital. West indicated that the cause of death was a haemorrhage resulting from a head injury. He found an oval bruise at the back of Gateley's ear about three-quarters of an inch long. The injury had been caused by a hard object. It was impossible to tell from the shape of the bruise what had caused the injury, other than that it was likely to be a blunt object, possibly a police truncheon.[64]

By quarter past four, the police had succeeded in clearing the north-east corner of Red Lion Square, after which they were able to bring in the Front to their meeting. Aside from Gateley, some forty-eight people were reported to have been injured and by the end of the day some fifty-one anti-fascists were arrested.

Martin Walker noted that in the aftermath of the events, the Front was jubilant. It was the Front who 'emerged as the innocent victims of political violence, the Left who emerged as the instigators'.[65] Richard Clutterbuck, an academic writer about terrorism, also read the day as a victory for the Front:

> Television films showed the NF marchers standing stock still with closed ranks on one side of Southampton Row while 'dirty, hairy lefties' swarmed about in a chaotic battle with the police on the other . . . The result was precisely what the NF would have wished: publicity for the purposes of their demonstration, discrediting of their detractors.[66]

So assured was the Front of its moral authority after Red Lion Square that Martin Webster wrote to the Home Secretary demanding that 'the leaders of the International Marxist Group, the International Socialists, the Communist Party and their individual associates on the Executive of the National Union of Students be indicted for conspiracy to incite and promote acts of criminal violence'.[67]

At Lord Scarman's Inquiry into the Red Lion Square disorders, Martin Webster admitted that he and John Tyndall had a history of anti-Semitism. He acknowledged the chants used by the Front, 'The Reds, the Reds, we've got to get rid of the Reds', and admitted that the Front expected their opponents to respond angrily to them. Webster named the two heads of the Front's honour guard, Ron Tier and Ken Merritt and claimed not to know that just four years before, Merritt had spent six months in prison for robbery with violence. As for the suggestion that the National Front was led by self-confessed Nazis and Hitlerites (i.e. himself and John Tyndall), Webster said that it was led 'by people who ten or twelve years ago were National Socialists but have long ceased to be so'. Webster became ill-tempered as his evidence wore on and his answers petulant. He later wrote to Scarman, 'I am a rather quick-tempered person . . . and it may be that I over-reacted. I can only plead that my intentions stumbled over my temperament.'[68] Ultimately, Scarman's conclusions gave succour to the Front, absolving the police and concluding that 'those who started the riot', by which he meant the IMG, 'carry a measure of moral responsibility for [Gateley's] death'.[69]

The events at Red Lion Square fit awkwardly into anti-fascist narratives of the 1970s. Undoubtedly, there were periods when physical confrontations with anti-fascists sapped the morale of the Front's supporters, reducing attendances at marches and public meetings and isolating the Front from potential supporters. But at other times and especially when the Front was able to claim the mantle of victimhood, physical confrontation seems to have boosted the Front's morale. In June 1974, the academic Nigel Fielding was carrying out fieldwork among Front branches in South London. He records the 'keen interest', with which members discussed the possibility of 'confrontation with opponents'. Branch members wanted to discuss practical plans to prevent anti-fascists from attacking their coaches while the Front marched. Some Front supporters were impressed by the security arrangements at Conway Hall, where sixty-five members of the Front's Honour Guard had been tasked with protecting the venue. One exchange between members ended with the NF's branch organiser saying 'The Front knows how to defend itself.'[70]

Around this time, Halifax National Front established a 'flying squad' with a goal of confronting marches by 'communist, leftist, immigrant or other groups'.[71]

Four months after Gateley's death, the NF branch in Birmingham wrote to its supporters: 'It is doubtful if many members are aware of the intense hostility which our campaign in Birmingham has engendered.' The letter described an attack which had been made by members of the IS and IMG on a Front meeting in Handsworth. That had been repulsed. However, it continued:

> We have received information that another public meeting, to be held on Tuesday 8 October at 8pm, is most certainly going to be subjected to the same treatment by the opposition who are determined to try and 'Smash the National Front in Birmingham'. The meeting will be their Waterloo and all activists are urged in the strongest possible terms to attend.[72]

Populists, Strasserites

Between 1974 and 1976, the presence of former Conservatives within the leadership of the Front such as Roy Painter (previously the unofficial leader of the pro-NF faction in the Monday Club), Anthony Reed-Herbert (previously the chair of Leicester Young Conservatives) and John Kingsley Read (recently the chairman of the Blackburn Young Conservatives) provided the conditions for a two-year inner-party feud concerning whether John Tyndall should remain the leader of the Front.

In September 1974, the TV programme *This Week* ran a documentary about the Front, during which a former chairman of the National Front, John O'Brien, called Martin Webster 'the perfect example of the school bully grown large', and set out the history of John Tyndall's involvement in neo-Nazi circles. Tyndall was then interviewed. Eight million people viewed the programme and such was its effect on the Front's members that a month later, also following a change to the Front's rules which gave every member a vote in elections to the party's Directorate, Tyndall was voted out as chairman and was replaced by John Kingsley Read.[73]

Tyndall's replacement, Kingsley Read, had proved himself outside the fascist milieu, having twice stood for the Conservatives as a councillor in Blackburn. He hoped to be the candidate for the parliamentary seat and on failing to be selected by the Tories, joined the Front instead. The owner of his own wholesale retail carpet and textile business, Kingsley Read went everywhere in a suit and tie. In one picture of clashes with anti-fascists, he was photographed smoking a cigarette through a holder, urbane and relaxed even in circumstances of some danger.[74]

John Tyndall's authority was not broken, however, by Kingsley Read's ascendancy and he resumed his previous role as deputy chairman. The veteran of decades of in-fighting within small groups, Tyndall had not ceased to believe in his own indispensability to the Front and he plotted his revenge against his detractors.

One of the documents given by a mole to the *Searchlight* archives is a letter from Ralph Marshall to other 'loyalists' within the NF, proposing to call a West Midlands District meeting at which a motion would be put condemning 'the opportunism which exists allowing founder members to be smeared by red terrorists and their lackeys', and expressing the district's confidence in John Tyndall. In order to ensure that the motion was passed, it was suggested that it should be opened up even to the small ultra-violent groups to the Front's right, such as the British Movement, seen as reliable opponents of the Populists. Tyndall was made aware of Marshall's support, and wrote back to him:,

> I would like to know who in the Birmingham branch . . . (a) Is in the 'populist' camp. (b) Is in the loyalist camp. (c) Is sitting on the fence. I can assure you that any such information will be kept confidential.[75]

Martin Webster told readers of *Spearhead* that Populism meant 'policy-trimming', and the victory of the 'Old Gang parties'. Populism, he wrote, 'is not Nationalism'. Roy Painter's response was titled, 'Let's make Nationalism Popular'. Tyndall's supporters in Kent circulated a leaflet demanding his return to the leadership, calling his opponents a 'power-hungry faction', and insisting that the Populists were planning to purge the NF not only of Tyndall but a number of other 'very long-standing senior official of the movement'. At the Front's AGM in January, he was met with jeering and hostile chants of 'Nazi, Nazi'. Tyndall in turn denounced Richard Lawson, the editor of *Britain First*, who had expressed his disagreement with the politics of Mussolini and the principle of a leadership cult.[76]

The Populists had a narrow majority of the Front's Directorate, its leading body, but Kingsley Read hesitated to demand Tyndall's expulsion. At a meeting on 23 October, one of their number, Walter Barton, abstained, resulting in a 10–9 vote against taking further action. The Directorate then attempted to reconvene with an Executive Council voting for Tyndall's removal. The Front's headquarters were occupied and the locks changed. However, Tyndall obtained an injunction from the High Court overturning his expulsion. After that, Tyndall's Populist critics resigned, forming a rival National Party and taking with them around a third of the Front's members. In their absence, Tyndall became chairman of the NF once more.

The Populists presented themselves as moderates, but in practice they replicated the Front's combination of racism, nationalism and electoralism. In particular, they were no less racist than their inner-party rivals. After a young Sikh man, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, was killed by racists, Kingsley Read told a public meeting, 'Fellow racialists, fellow Britons and fellow whites, I have been told I cannot refer to coloured immigrants, so you can forgive me if I refer to niggers, wogs and coons.' He then moved to the events of Chaggar's death, saying, 'One down, one million to go'.[77] Kingsley Read was prosecuted for racial incitement, but he was strongly supported by the judge, His Honour Neil McKinnon, who encouraged the jury to acquit him.

Also among those who left the Front at the same time were such figures as David McCalden and Richard Lawson who were moving towards a 'Strasserite' reading of German history, namely that the Nazi revolution had been a popular uprising of the unemployed and the poor which was betrayed by Hitler, the revolution's gravedigger. Rather than escape from the legacy of fascism, the new party was pulled back towards an exotic and sectarian form of it. Tyndall's critics were, in short, an unsustainable mixture of discontents from both the electoral and the militant wings of the Front, the two groups sharing little more than a sustained dislike of him.

Racism: state and popular

Having been boosted once when he first became chairman, by the arrival of refugees from Uganda, Tyndall enjoyed a similar piece of luck on his return to the leadership with the arrival of the Malawi Asians in spring 1976. The press coverage began when two families were placed in a hotel while Crawley Social Services decided whether or not to house them. *The Sun* claimed that refugees were living in four-star hotels and *The Mirror* condemned what it called a 'New Flood of Asians into Britain'. Front supporters rushed to Gatwick where they chanted at visiting tourists, 'Don't unpack, you must go back.' *The Sun* warned that 4,000 other migrants were bound to follow; the *Daily Express* that the true number of new arrivals would be as high as 145,000 people.[78] While the British tabloid press was able to recycle its favourite stories about the country being swamped by a vat influx of new arrivals, few paused to check the numbers involved. Among the entire Asian population of Malawi, there were no more than two hundred British passport holders altogether.[79]

In an atmosphere of increased racism, the NF recruited around 3,000 new members. Local elections were due for May 1976, days after the Malawi Asians story broke. The average Front candidate won 8.9 per cent of the vote.[80] In Leicester, the Front came within sixty votes of winning its first council seat. At parliamentary by-elections in Rotherham in June and Thurrock in July 1976, the National Front scored between 6 and 7 per cent of the vote, The vote in Rotherham was all the more impressive given that at the start of the campaign the Front had had no more than two members in the town.[81] 'It is difficult to communicate', Stuart Hall wrote, the 'severity of the race issues which have passed, like seismic tremors, through society in 1976.'[82]

The Front's message was that immigration control would prove insufficient to protect the white identity of Britain and that measures for control needed to be supplanted by measures for repatriation. Indeed, the Front was not alone in advocating this policy. For several years, Enoch Powell had been an advocate of repatriation ('outflow') as he explained in his Rivers of Blood speech:

> The natural and rational first question with a nation confronted by such a prospect [of mass migration] is to ask: 'How can its dimensions be reduced?' Granted it be not wholly preventable, can it be limited, bearing in mind that numbers are of the essence: the significance and consequences of an alien element introduced into a country or population are profoundly different according to whether that element is 1 per cent or 10 per cent.
>
> The answers to the simple and rational question are equally simple and rational: by stopping or virtually stopping, further inflow and by promoting the maximum outflow.[83]

Meanwhile, the Monday Club had also adopted a policy of repatriation, a message developed in pamphlets such as George Young's *Who Goes Home?*.[84]

The Front was different from either of its rivals on the right in that it argued the politics of repatriation consistently; it grasped the practical reality that the large majority of black people in Britain had no intention of leaving and would not actually depart unless the state was to equip itself with the same sort of authoritarian resources that the fascist states of the 1930s had employed against racial outsiders.

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968 had, as noted above, deprived UK passport holders of the right to live in Britain except for people born in the UK or their descendants – in other words, white people and their families. This structure was repeated in the Immigration Act 1971, which ended all Commonwealth migration except for a tiny category of 'patrials', again defined by UK (i.e. white) ancestry.[85] Britain had become a locked-door to new arrivals, yet anti-migrant sentiment did not reduce. Rather, with the rise of the National Front it took on a new force. It was in this context that the Front's high votes in spring 1976 were read, as a series of popular referendums on the party's signature policy of repatriation.

On 6 July 1976, the House of Commons held a debate on immigration. The Conservatives' deputy leader William Whitelaw opened by stating that Britain had always been a generous society. 'However,' he continued, 'we all know today that these principles of the fair and tolerant society which we seek to uphold will be undermined if individual fears and resentments are allowed to grow.' Immigration, he continued, was threatening to turn the UK into an unfair and intolerant society. The answer, he implied, was not a return to generosity but the physical exclusion of outsiders.

Unlike Whitelaw himself, whose language remained coded throughout, many of the Tory MPs who followed him used openly racist language. Robert Taylor, MP for Croydon North West, began by saying, 'The area which I represent does not wish to be like Southall, which is synonymous with the Asian community.' His colleague Nicholas Winterton demanded the termination of 'all further immigration, from all sources, immediately'. Another Conservative MP, John Page, went further: no new immigration should be allowed for a minimum of five years.

Another Tory MP, Michael Shersby, demanded that 'all future illegal immigrants', irrespective of how or why they came to Britain, should be repatriated.

As the debate reaches its crescendo, John Stokes, the Tory MP for Halesowen and a member of the Monday Club, pointed to the 'growing support for the National Front' and insisted that if immigration was not stopped there would 'be an explosion of wrath from ordinary English people such as we have never known in our long history'. Employing language from which no Front speaker would have demurred, Stokes portrayed Britain's crisis as having both a gendered and a racial aspect. The solution to the breakdown of both family and nation was ethnic homogeneity:

> I have seen my task as that of trying to keep all that is best in England and to be able to hand on to my children, as my father handed on to me, a country to be proud of, a homogeneous nation, sharing the same faith, history and background.

He, like the Front, had a notion that Britain's war efforts of 1939–1945 had been stabbed in the back by racial conspirators who had conspired to hand the country to others, the majority having 'never realised that we in Great Britain had won that war only to hand over parts of our territory to alien races'. Stokes demanded that the government adopt new policies of generalised repatriation: 'The young immigrants who have just come here will have to return to their homelands and their families.'[86]

As a result of the Front's electoral success, opinions which had first been argued at the fringes of British politics were now being echoed in Parliament.

Notes

1 M. Billig, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* (London: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1978), p. 113.
2 R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 241.
3 D. Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); G. Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).
4 *Union*, 17 April 1948; Renton, *Fascism*, p. 41.
5 Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 241.
6 J. Steele, 'The bloody minded left', *The National European*, July 1964; J. Hamm, 'Europe-Africa'. *The National European*, July 1964; *The Thunderer*, May 1969.
7 *Kensington News and West London Times*, 28 March 1969.
8 Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black*, pp. 70–71; S. Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 108.
9 *Union Movement Report*, 8 December 1962.
10 G. Thayer, *The British Political Fringe: A Profile* (London: Anthony Blond, 1965), p. 52.
11 Renton, *Fascism*, p. 41.
12 Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 210.
13 H. McNeile and R. Black, *The History of the League of Empire Loyalists and Candour* (London: A. K. Chesterton Trust, 2014), p. 28.
14 McNeile and Black, *The History of the League*, p. 105.
15 Harmston also stood for the Union Movement at a by-election in Uxbridge in 1972, the last parliamentary election contested by that party.
16 *The Times*, 24 April 1968.
17 In South London, the NF took a different view, with Dave Pascoe pointing out Powell's opposition to capital punishment and support for the decriminalisation of homosexuality and warning that he could not be trusted: D. Pascoe, 'Enoch Powell: friend or fraud', *Britain First* 1(1) (1968), p. 4.
18 P. Foot, *The Rise of Enoch Powell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 126. Anti-fascists later obtained an NF membership list from February 1968 (i.e. directly before Powell's speech); it confirmed that the Front had just four members in Huddersfield at the start of the year: Searchlight Archive, University of Northampton, BRI/02/029.
19 Jordan's activities in 1967–1977 are discussed in P. Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 50–51.
20 Jenny Doyle to Richard Verrall, 8 July 1979, Searchlight Archive, University of Northampton, BRI/02/06.
21 J. Tyndall, *The Eleventh Hour: A Call for British Rebirth* (London: Albion Press, 1988), p. 11.
22 R. Hill, with A. Bell, *The Other Face of Terror: Inside Europe's Neo-Nazi Network* (London: Grafton Books, 1988), p. 159.
23 S. Beauman, 'What lies behind the Front', *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 October 1977.

24 M. Walker, *The National Front* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 40; Hill with Bell, *The Other Face of Terror*, p. 159.
25 Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 238; 'Ceremony of blood mingling', *Daily Mirror*, 3 October 1963.
26 Hill, with Bell, *The Other Face of Terror*, p. 151. The references to ballerinas and chorus girls was a jibe against Tyndall's by then former ally Martin Webster.
27 P. Trevelyan, 'Why there is anti-semitism', *Spearhead* 3 (January 1965), p. 7.
28 Julius, 'Gleanings from the Ghetto', *Spearhead* 4 (February 1965), p. 5.
29 J. Tyndall, 'The meaning of Greater Britain', *Spearhead* 8 (July 1965), p. 6.
30 S. Taylor, *The National Front in English Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 55.
31 J. Bean, *Many Shades of Black: Inside Britain's Far Right* (London: Millennium, 1999), p. 151.
32 Walker, *The National Front*, p. 75.
33 Bean, *Many Shades of Black*, p. 202.
34 Hill, with Bell, *The Other Face of Terror*, p. 84; Thurlow, *Fascism*, p. 239.
35 Beauman, 'What lies behind the Front'.
36 'Police stand by as NF invade the Fabians', *Colchester Gazette*, 10 February 1970.
37 'National front man tackles PM', *Hertfordshire Express*, 9 September 1971.
38 'The "Red" Rev is heckled in his church', *Kentish Independent*, 17 December 1971. Osterreicher would later be a founder member of the Anti-Nazi League.
39 'Race chief is heckled by National Front men', *Luton News,* 7 October 1971.
40 Bean, *Many Shades of Black*, p. 214.
41 N. Fielding, *The National Front* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 159–160.
42 M. Walker, *The National Front* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 133.
43 Y. Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook* (London: Portobello, 2009), p. 281.
44 Walker, *The National Front*, pp. 135–136.
45 M. Pitchford, *The Conservative Party and the Extreme Right 1945–1975* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 172; G. Bowd, *Fascist Scotland: Caledonia and the Far Right* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2013), p. 252.
46 Walker, *The National Front*, pp. 125–126.
47 'John Tyndall speaks to Monday Club', *Spearhead*, March 1973, p. 18.
48 Walker, *National Front*, pp. 119–132; Pitchford, *The Conservative Party*, pp. 204–212.
49 Message from the chairman of the National Front', *Spearhead* 94 (May 1976), p. 20
50 J. Tyndall, 'Sunday Mirror dredges the depths', *Spearhead* 100 (December 1976), p. 4.
51 J. Tyndall, 'My answer to the smear-mongers', *Spearhead* 122 (October 1978), pp. 6–7.
52 Searchlight and Tyne & Wear Anti-Fascist Association, *Fascism and the Labour Movement: Facing the Threat* (London: Searchlight, 1999), p. 30; E. Smith, *British Communism and the Politics of Race* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 148–150; A. Sivanandan, 'From resistance to rebellion', *Race and Class* 2(31) (1981), pp. 110–152, at 138.
53 'The National Front and the trade unions', *Searchlight* 83 (April 1975), pp. 16–17; 'Back to work at Imperial', *Race Today*, September 1974; D. Edgar, 'Racism, fascism and the politics of the National Front', *Race & Class* 19(2) (1977), pp. 111–131; Fielding, *The National Front*, p. 159; A. Sivanandan, *Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1986), pp. 139–140; Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 15.
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55 J. Pearce, *Race with the Devil: My Journey from Racial Hatred to Rational Love* (Charlotte, NC: St Benedict Press, 2013), p. 63.
56 'Why I was a racist', in Big Flame, *A Close Look at Fascism and Racism* (Liverpool: Big Flame, 1978), p. 8.
57 R. Tomlinson, *Ricky* (London: Time Warner Books, 2003), pp. 83, 85, 87.
58 Rev. T. Holden, *So What Are You Going to Do about the National Front?* (Birmingham: Sidelines, 1978), p. 4.
59 Walker, *The National Front*, p. 145.
60 T. Gilbert, *Only One Died* (London: Kay Beauchamp, 1975); National Union of Students, *The Myth of Red Lion Square* (London: NUS, 1975).

61 There is a short, plausible account of the fighting at the junction of Old North Street and Red Lion Square in M. Lux, *Anti-Fascist* (London: Phoenix, 2006), pp. 23–24. Lux, whose account is generally supportive of militant anti-fascism, recalls the CPE (M-L) contingent, describing them as the 'most militant (or should that be crazed?) faction' on the day.
62 *The Red Lion Square Disorders of 15 June 1974 Report of Inquiry by the Rt. Hon. Lord Justice Scarman OBE* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1975), p. 7.
63 Gilbert, *Only One Died*, p. 129. Forty years later, Mullen gave a similar account of the day's events in D. Hann, *Physical Resistance. Or, a Hundred Years of Anti-Fascism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2013), pp. 242–243.
64 Transcript of inquest of Kevin Gateley, 12 July 1974, pp. 11–15. National Archives HO 233/59.
65 Walker, *National Front*, p. 163.
66 R. Clutterbuck, *Britain in Agony* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 63.
67 M. Webster, 'Report to the Home Secretary', 8 July 1974, Searchlight Archive, BRI/02/16.
68 M. Webster to Scarman LJ, 11 September 1974. National Archives HO 233/83.
69 T. Gilbert, *Only One Died*, pp. 31–38, 203–207; *The Red Lion Square Disorders*, p. 12.
70 Fielding, *The National Front,* p. 37.
71 National Front Halifax Group, 'Members' local bulletin' 4 (26 February 1975), Searchlight Archive, BRI/02/24.
72 National Front, Birmingham Branch, 4 October 1974. Searchlight Archive, 2.276.29.
73 Walker, *National Front*, p. 149.
74 *John Kingsley Read* (Birmingham: A. F. and R. Publications, 1975), p. 3.
75 Letter from R. S. Marshall, undated but July 1975; Tyndall to Marshall, 29 August 1975, both in Searchlight Archive, BRI/02/16. Ralph Marshall was in fact an anti-fascist spy and a member of the Communist Party, David Roberts. 'Mr R. S. Marshall and the NF', *Searchlight*, May 1976.
76 Walker, *National Front*, pp. 153–156, 182–183.
77 'Ex-NF man on race hate charge', *Standard*, 4 January 1978. At Read's trial, Judge Neil McKinnon told the jury that the law against incitement to racial hatred did not cover 'reasoned argument in favour of immigration control or even repatriation'. He continued that 'it was difficult to say what it is that this defendant is alleged to have done that amounts to a criminal offence'. On Read's acquittal, McKinnon told him, 'By all means propagate the views you may have but try to avoid involving the sort of action which has been taken against you. I wish you well': J. Kelman, *And the Judge Said* (London: Polygon, 2008), p. 75. '"Nigger" Mackinnon', *Observer*, 8 January 1978. A couple of weeks later McKinnon asked a black defendant to a traffic incident, 'Have you ever thought of going back to Barbados?': L. Flynn, 'Another racist on the bench', *Socialist Worker*, 4 February 1978. 113 Labour MPs called for McKinnon's removal; however, he remained on the bench.
78 S. Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 edn), p. 329.
79 Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, p. 585.
80 Z. Layton Henry, *The Politics of Race in Britain* (London: George Unwin, 1984), p. 93; Searchlight, *From Ballots to Bombs: The Inside Story of the National Front's Political Soldiers* (London: Searchlight Publishing, 1984), p. 4; Taylor, *The National Front*, pp. 45, 102.
81 Fielding, *The National Front*, p. 31. At about the same time, the Front also established a presence for the first time in Stainforth in North Yorkshire: D. J. Douglass, *The Wheel's Still in Spin* (Hastings: Read 'n' Noir, 2009), p. 352.
82 Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, p. 328.
83 *The Telegraph*, 6 November 2007.
84 Pitchford, *The Conservative Party*, pp. 204–212.
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86 M. Barker, *The New Racism* (London: Pluto, 1980), p. 18.

3

THE OTHER YOUNG BELIEVERS

There have been anti-fascists in Britain since the early 1920s.[1] In the 1930s, Mosley's British Union of Fascists was confronted by a large anti-fascist campaign, led at times by the Communist Party[2] and including Jewish and ex-servicemen's organisations. After the war, the revival of fascism led to the formation of the 43 Group, a network of anti-fascist Jews.[3] By the 1960s, the 43 Group had given way to a new organisation, the 62 Group with one supporter of the latter, Gerry Gable, helping to establish the anti-fascist intelligence bureau Searchlight in 1963 and, from 1965 to 1967, a newspaper (today a magazine) of the same name. Other anti-racist groups included the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, established following Martin Luther King's visit to England in 1964 and the Movement for Colonial Freedom (later Liberation), which called the anti-NF protests in Red Lion Square.

In December 1966 when the LEL, RPS and BNP held a conference at Caxton Hall to announce the formation of the National Front, they were opposed. The Anti-Apartheid Movement had already booked a room in Caxton Hall on the same day and anti-fascists used the fact of the double booking to try and force their way into the building. To prevent disturbances, the Front had to close the doors to its own event, excluding around two-thirds of the intended participants.[4]

Many of the earliest anti-Front activities were conducted by the 62 Group. It was not a large organisation but it was committed to harassing the Front at every opportunity. Several leading personalities within the 62 Group had served in the British Army during 1939–1945, including Harry Bidney, who had been a warrant officer and Cyril Paskin, a former RAF sergeant in Burma.[5] Typical 62 Group actions included breaking into the National Front's headquarters at Tulse Hill in 1967 and stealing a large volume of documents, and then repeating the attack two years later when they also destroyed the Front's printing machines.[6]

Within the trade union movement, a different approach dominated. The emphasis was on persuading large numbers of voters to reject the Front. Martin Walker suggests that in the early 1970s, union-backed local campaigns were a serious obstacle to the Front: 'The more successful it became in local elections, the more left-wing and liberal bodies throughout the country recognised the threat and began to mobilise against it.'[7] He gives the example of trade unionists in Leicester who circulated 20,000 copies of a leaflet showing John Tyndall in a Nazi uniform. Wayne Asher was one of those who distributed this material. In his account:

> Leaflets exposing the background of Tyndall and Webster created such anxiety among rank and file NF members . . . that NF HQ had to issue a special circular to Leicester members reassuring them that the charges only referred to a few people.[8]

From 1973 onwards, the use of the image became a recurring tactic of almost every anti-fascist group. John Tyndall and the National Front were to complain repeatedly and fruitlessly that the photographs were more than a decade old and that most supporters of the Front had never been in Tyndall's Greater Britain Movement.

Anti-Fascist Committees (AFCs) were set up in a number of towns. A South Tyneside Anti-Fascist Committee was formed in 1972 with the support of the local Trades Council and Claimants' Union. It campaigned against the Front during local and national elections. Two years later, Bernard Appleton, secretary of the South Shields Trades Council and a prominent North East anti-fascist had his face slashed with a razor. This incident followed the count at the October general election. Harry Donkin, a former Labour councillor who had defected to the Front, saw Appleton and pointed him out. Thugs then chased Appleton and attacked him.[9]

A Manchester Anti-Fascist Committee was up and running by 1974; its members included long-term community activist Mike Luft and Graeme Atkinson, a former member of Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League. Around this time, Paul Rose, Labour MP for Manchester Blackley, also helped to establish a further network, Democratic Defence, following threats from local fascists.

The Front complained after Luft and Atkinson printed leaflets calling on the electorate to vote for anyone but the Front. The anti-fascists were prosecuted for breaching electoral rules. A stipendiary magistrate dismissed the charges, reasoning that while Luft and Atkinson had been campaigning against the Front, they had not solicited votes for anyone else in particular and therefore that they were under no obligation to register their spending as spending for any of the other parties. The magistrates' interpretation of the law was overturned on appeal.[10]

Up to 1974 and with the exception of the campaign in Leicester, none of these local movements succeeded in pushing back the Front. Most voters were neither sympathetic nor hostile to that party. Bob Murdoch was a white-collar worker at the North East engineering company C. A. Parsons and a committed anti-fascist. The far right, Murdoch recalls, was rarely discussed even in union circles: 'There was no feeling that the National Front was the threat. The enemy was the company.'

However, as the Front started to stand candidates locally, concerns grew. But even then, only a minority saw a need to confront the NF:

> We first raised it at a general meeting in 1974. One or two of the right-wingers raised a rival motion. We put it to the reps committee, which was still sixty strong or even bigger. Both motions were put and both rejected. It wasn't something in which our members wanted to get involved.[11]

In the aftermath of Kevin Gateley's death in June 1974, the numbers turning out for anti-fascist protests increased. Some 8,000 people joined a silent march through central London in Gateley's memory. A protest in Oxford that October saw National Front candidate Ian Anderson excluded from his own election meeting at Headington Middle School. Two days later, anti-fascists captured his platform a second time, forcing Anderson to flee from the stage at Oxford Town Hall.[12]

The following spring, 2,000 people joined an anti-fascist protest outside a Front meeting in Oxford.[13] John Tyndall and fifty members of his Honour Guard, armed with bicycle chains and iron bars, attempted to fight their way through the crowd into the meeting. Seven anti-Front demonstrators were hospitalised.[14]

The anti-fascists of the 1970s were recruited from a generation who had lived through the events of 1968. They had seen the North Vietnamese score victories against the military power of the United States, the protests that followed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August and the general strike that broke out in France in May 1968. For socialists, looking on with pleasure as Edward Heath's Tory government was challenged by wave after wave of strikes, it was easy to imagine that each small protest would be a followed by a larger demonstration, each demonstration by a strike, each strike by a further occupation and on and on until the workers' movement was strong enough to challenge for power.

Yet once Labour had taken office in 1974, the optimism waned. The unions accepted a policy of wage restraint, the so-called 'Social Contract'. The number of protests and strikes reduced sharply. Tactics of struggle that would have succeeded against Heath failed under Wilson. By the mid-1970s, a feeling of inertia was widespread on the left. Socialist-feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham noticed a new mood of demoralisation. Somehow, the movements of the late 1960s had begun to lose their confidence. 'We were very active,' she recalls,

> but there was some peculiar notion of a pause . . . There was lots of activity around hospitals and community politics. Also trade union struggles, like equal pay. Then we started to have meetings on women and literature, women and film. Then I was pregnant. It seemed to be something happening to me . . . The government started to make cuts. We had to defend things. It no longer seemed that workers' control was going to happen.

The early years of the second Wilson government saw the NF repeatedly attacking left-wing meetings. In 1975, the Front broke into a meeting held at the

University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) on 'The State, the Law and Northern Ireland', sponsored by the National Council of Civil Liberties and the white-collar union TASS and with members of Big Flame and the International Marxist Group in attendance. Front supporters shouted, 'Jewish maggots' and 'People like you should be exterminated'. In the fighting that followed, six anti-fascists were injured, one of them Graeme Atkinson needing nineteen stitches after a bottle was smashed in his face. Another, Malcolm Peach, suffered an eye injury and a broken arm.[15] Thirty people were arrested. Lawyer Steve Cohen spoke:

> I wrote the pamphlet on the Prevention of Terrorism Act for the NCCL which was to the subject of the meeting. The other invited speaker was the then MP Bernadette Devlin. Bernadette didn't make it but I'm sure it was her intended presence that provoked the NF. I never managed to get into the meeting as I was beaten up by the NF outside. My most vivid memory is then seeing an NF contingent line up alongside an Ulster Volunteer Force banner and then engage in a triumphalist march outside UMIST with the cops doing nothing.[16]

Ian Birchall describes a widespread feeling of anxiety on the left: 'You felt the threat, in terms of graffiti, in terms of the numbers [the National Front] could put on demonstrations, in terms of the results they were getting in elections.' John Shemeld was a lecturer living in south London. Ten years older than most anti-fascists, he recalls: 'We were in a hopeless situation. People would go on about "the Pakis" . . . They [the Front] seemed to be the ones that had the resonance.'

A small number of Front recruits came from the left. In the *New Statesman*, Christopher Hitchens gave the example of Michael Lobb, a former Marxist, who had campaigned for the National Front in Silvertown, using the issue of redundancies at Tate and Lyle. In Bolton, the National Front candidate was Bill Roberts of Edbro Engineering: 'Although he goes on about frightened old ladies, falling property values and the other standbys he is certainly no fascist and he estimates that half his local branch are ex-Labour voters.'[17] Other examples could have been given: David McCalden, a Northern Irish Holocaust denier[18] and National Front supporter, who told interviewees that as a teenager he had been a Maoist; Les Rodgers, a former Communist in the Front's Birmingham branch; Bruce Anderson-Lyness, branch organiser of Sunderland NF who was said by other members of the Front to have previously been in the Young Communist League.[19]

Christine Collette was working full-time as the staff-side representative at Lewisham Council. A socialist in the Labour Party, she remembers a series of political campaigns seeking to challenge racism. In the council, there were three reps, one for white-collar workers, one for direct labour and one for blue-collar workers. The last, she believed, was an 'out-and-out racist' who tried to prevent black people from being recruited to work in his section. This rep was confronted and voted out.

The Front had a base around Brick Lane. According to Dave Widgery, it was

> impossible for anyone living or working in the E1 area not to have witnessed the provocations; doorstep and bus-stop abuse, the daubing of menacing graffiti, the window-breaking and air-gun pot shots, the stone- and bottle-hurling sorties on Sundays and the threatening atmosphere around certain estates and tube stations.[20]

The Labour Party announced that it was planning a campaign against racism and the National Front. However, Labour's response to the Front was uneven. A party political broadcast from 1976 showed some of the contradictions of Labour's position. Michael Foot spoke, along with Tom Jackson of the Union of Post Office Workers and Millie Miller MP. Jackson argued against the Front from an internationalist position, saying that 'The trade union movement was founded on solidarity, unity and international brotherhood. We must not allow anything to divide us, not race, not colour, not creed.' Michael Foot, by contrast, told his audience that Labour was already cracking down on immigrants: 'Some people don't seem to realise just how strictly immigration to Britain is controlled already.'[21]

The Communist Party was still by far the largest and best-rooted force to the left of Labour; however, it was shedding support. Its strategy of working closely with Labour was cutting it off from new generations of young workers for whom Labour's record in power was far from compelling.[22]

With the larger organisations of the left unable or unwilling to take a lead in the anti-racist campaigns, the initiative fell to other groups. Trades councils became more important, as did black organisations and members of the younger far-left parties, including the International Marxist Group and the International Socialists.

In February 1976, supporters of the NF attacked an IS Right to Work meeting in Bolton and a South West African People's Organisation meeting in Edinburgh. The left was able to claim a revenge of sorts when 1,500 anti-racists opposed a National Front march in Coventry. The Front's Andrew Fountaine, John Tyndall and Martin Webster all claimed to have been assaulted.[23] In March 1976, the IS called a picket of the BBC, after it had allowed Front supporters onto its *Open Door* programme. In April, anti-fascists confronted a Front demonstration through Manningham in Bradford. Some six hundred supporters of the Front clashed with 3,000 anti-fascists, the day ending with anti-fascists stoning the vans of the police protecting the Front. Anti-fascists were divided into two blocs, with a predominantly white demonstration marching into the city centre, while most black activists insisted on protecting Manningham. At the time of the demonstration, Tariq Mehmood was a member of IS, albeit increasingly at odds with his party:

> Lots of us lived in Manningham . . . Manningham was ours and we had to protect it. It was there that we really started thinking that we've got to get our own house in order, we can't have this, we can't leave our future in the hands of people like the community leaders or the Labour Party types.[24]

Marsha Singh was a member of Militant; he too was angered by the willingness of most white demonstrators to leave Manningham at the day's end: 'I thought it was a betrayal of everything they were supposed to have taught me.'[25]

In May 1976, there were large anti-racist marches in Birmingham, Portsmouth and Southall, while in June, there were more protests in east London, Southall, Brixton and central London. In Rotherham, IS members divided themselves into two contingents. One hundred and fifty took part in an Engineers' Union demonstration for 'racial harmony', while around the same number again acted as a mobile picket, heckling the NF march and defending Eastwood, the Asian area of the town.[26] Supporters of the IS joined occupations of the BBC studios in Newcastle and Leeds, in protest against interviews with the Front.

Perhaps the far right's best-known personality was the landlord Robert Relf, whose career on the right had included a stint as a bodyguard for Colin Jordan.[27] In 1976, Relf placed a sign outside his house in Leamington, 'For Sale to an English family'. The poet James Fenton attended meeting in Tilbury, in Relf's support.

> 'Parliamentary language' barely conceals the assumptions which the Tilbury meeting shared. Indeed it is in a way refreshing to go from Westminster to such a gathering and hear people say what they really mean. As for Labour, the issue is fought in the worst possible terms – arguments about numbers and whether the pool of immigrants will ever dry up.[28]

Relf was prosecuted under the Race Relations Act and convicted. The press chose to present Relf as a race martyr. In July 1976, the Front attempted to organise a march through London to demand Relf's release. However, anti-fascists captured Relf's 'For Sale' sign and rushed it to Southall, where a demonstration by the IS, the Southall Youth Movement and the Indian Workers' Association burned it.[29]

In central London, 15,000 people joined marches called by the two Indian Workers' Associations against racism in July. Four thousand people protested against the Front and the National Party in Blackburn in September. In October, two hundred and fifty people picketed the Front's AGM, while a weekly confrontation began between NF paper-sellers, and members of the International Socialists in Brick Lane. In November, 25,000 joined a TUC march against racism, and another 1,000 demonstrated in support of Asian immigrants fleeing to Britain from Malawi.

Dreamers and practical people

As the 1970s wore on, an increasing part in the anti-fascist campaign was being played by the International Socialists (later the SWP). With about 3,000 members in 1976, IS was not the largest force on the left but only one of several Trotskyist parties of roughly the same size (the International Marxist Group, Militant, Gerry Healy and Vanessa Redgrave's Workers' Revolutionary Party), each competing

for hegemony in the space beyond Labour. IS's founder, Tony Cliff, from a Polish Jewish family, was born in Palestine, and at the age of 30 emigrated to England in 1947. In his heavily accented English, he peppered his speeches with metaphors and unexpected jokes. From the 1940s, Cliff had developed an analysis of the Soviet Union as 'state capitalist'. An approach which insisted that socialism was incompatible with bureaucratic control made IS attractive to students shaped by the events of 1968, including the general strike in France and Dubcek's anti-Soviet uprising in Czechoslovakia. The large number of actors, graphic designers and musicians who were to play a part in the anti-fascist campaigns attests to the importance of this generation on the left.

After Powell's 1968 speech, the International Socialists had issued an appeal to other left groups calling for unity against what was termed the 'Urgent Challenge of Fascism'. 'The outbreak of racialist sentiment and activity since Enoch Powell's Birmingham speech marks the beginning of a new phase in British politics,' IS warned. 'The ready response to his speech has revealed the prevalence of racist ideas among workers, which had been inculcated by centuries of capitalism and imperialism.'[30] The move was ignored, however, by the rest of the left.

From the early 1960s, Tony Cliff had argued that the coming force in society was the shop stewards' movement. From 1970, IS began to make inroads among unionised workers, recruiting the likes of Micky Fenn among the London dockers, or the stewards in the Birmingham engineering works who took up the call to mobilise at Saltley Gates. During the 1972–1974 strike wave, Cliff's ideas appeared to be vindicated. Yet after 1974, as the strikes ebbed, he sought to reorient the IS towards a new emphasis on younger workers without an established political tradition.[31]

The IS-sponsored Right to Work campaign, which was launched in October 1975, was an expression of this new politics. Various Labour MPs gave their backing to Right to Work marches, including Eric Heffer, Harry Selby and Brian Sedgemore. Several dozen trade union branches also gave their backing, as did Ernie Roberts of the engineering workers' union and Harry McShane, who had led the unemployed struggles of the 1920s. The first Right to Work demonstration took place in March 1976. It was called to protest against wage freezes, social services cuts and unemployment figures of over a million.[32] Six hundred marchers participated, walking more than three hundred miles from Manchester to London.[33]

Ruth Gregory had been the graphic organiser for the Communist Party in Australia in Sydney before returning to London in 1976. She lived in Brixton and met IS members campaigning around unemployment and against racist policing:

> We had a Right to Work office, people would come in and we'd give them advice about how to fight back. We occupied Brixton dole office. It was a Victorian building in the middle of a tarmac playground. The queues were so long they went down the whole street. We went in, kidnapped the manager and hung placards out of the windows.

Over the next year, Gregory would take up employment at the SWP printshop and meet the writer Dave Widgery and the photographer Red Saunders.

Meanwhile, the reorientation away from the shop stewards confused many of Cliff's allies and in December 1975 around one hundred and fifty members left IS, including the former editor of *Socialist Worker* Roger Protz and IS's National Secretary Jim Higgins.[34]

A year later, as IS set out about changing its name to the SWP, the group was still in a state of turmoil, torn between two different models of organising – one based on the shop stewards or another based on disaffected urban youth. The International Socialists provided a training for many of the future anti-fascists of the late 1970s. The best of them were able to wear this education lightly, seeing their own group not as 'the leadership', but as one part of a possible revival of the left.[35]

The second generation

Another key source of support for anti-fascism came from a generation of young black British people, many of them the children of migrants. The National Front's defining policy was its threat to repatriate every black person. But where was this second generation supposed to go? In the words of Chris Mullard:

> We are different from our parents in many ways. The only home we know is Britain. We are more difficult to understand than the black immigrant. A black immigrant often speaks another language. He may wear different clothes, he may eat different foods. All in all he will most definitely have a different life pattern from the white Briton. But a black Briton . . . .[36]

Jamaican writer Rodney James lived in Leeds and London:

> Most of my generation of Afro-Caribbeans in Britain was in one way or another profoundly affected by the Rastafarian movement that swept across the Atlantic to Britain. Besieged as we and our parents were by British racism, we welcomed its attack upon white supremacy and its attempts to decolonize our minds. From the United States, Black Power also came to Britain and we became familiar with the writings and struggles of George Jackson, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Angela Davis and Stokeley Carmichael.

James met other young campaigners from the Caribbean and from Africa:

> My closest friends . . . were from Grenada, Guyana and South Africa . . . I also developed friendship with Asian comrades from the Indian subcontinent and East Africa, many of whom had been radicalised by the insurgent and murderous fascism of the far-right National Front.[37]

Tariq Mehmood's novel, *Hand on the Sun*, describes a cycle of official racism through the 1970s, in which every state authority worked to humble black people and Asians. Instinctively, they resisted. In his novel, the possibility of struggle is represented by Jalib, who fights with racists even before he has left primary school:

> When he first arrived in Britain, he had imagined that these *goras* were not real human beings but some sort of supermen . . . But one day a white kid had hit him and without thinking much, except that he had had enough, Jalib had struck back in anger. His punch had landed on the nose of the white boy. On seeing a small stream of blood, Jalib had been filled with both fear and wonder: fear, because he was scared that this all-powerful white boy would release his implacable wrath . . . wonder, because he had never imagined that the blood of white people was the same colour as his own.[38]

At the start of the decade, black and especially Asian people were perceived as easy targets for racist violence. As the decade wore on, hundreds of thousands of people found themselves having no choice but to meet this violence with force of their own. Many Asian and African-Caribbean radicals from the 1970s have memories of the first time they stood up to racist or fascist violence. Saeed Hussain of the United Black Youth League (a split from the Asian Youth Movement in Bradford) recalls suffering beatings at school in the 1970s, until he and friends confronted the culprit:

> there was about four of us who went to the local shop and there was this bully, he was on his own actually walking towards the shop . . . And we stopped. And he did say, you know, 'Get out of my way you fucking Pakis.' And we looked at each other and said, 'We're not going anywhere. If you want you can walk either through us or you can walk round us. It's your choice today.' And then after about a minute's stare, he did walk around us . . . head down and just walked off. That was the most liberating experience.[39]

By the end of the decade, resistance had ceased to be an individual task, as Balraj Purewal of the Southall Youth Movement recalls:

> We went round kind of giving support . . . to make Southall a no-go zone for racists . . . We had a white colleague who we recruited to the National Front and he would get the leaflets and we would know which pubs they're meeting in. I remember going to one in Isleworth. They used to meet there and plan which estate to attack. There used to be 80–90 of us.[40]

Two especially important examples of black-led militant campaigns were the Asian Youth Movements, which had branches in Bradford, Southall and Birmingham, and the London-based Race Today Collective.

The Asian Youth Movements emerged from an existing campaign, the Indian Workers' Association (IWA), a social organisation of working-class Sikhs and Muslims. First founded in Coventry in 1937,[41] the association had revived in the 1950s, with the support of exiled members of the Communist Party of India, in part as a response to anti-immigration laws.[42] By 1976, there were three main IWAs: one in Southall, led by Vishnu Sharma;[43] a second, around Prem Singh, linked to the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and a third, led by Avtar Jouhl, influenced by Maoism, which had strong support among foundry workers in the West Midlands.[44]

On 4 June 1976, a 16-year-old youth, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, was stabbed and killed in Southall by two white men, Jody Hill and Robert Hackman.[45] The day after Chaggar's death, 22-year-old Suresh Grover was walking with a friend Denis Almeida, when they saw blood on the pavement outside the Dominion Theatre. Grover asked a police officer, 'Whose blood is it?' and was told, 'it was just an Asian'. Grover and Almeida took the initiative, covering the pool of blood with red cloth and painting a message on the pavement: 'This racist murder will be avenged.' A dozen watched as they painted the message. On the Saturday evening, some five hundred people gathered outside the theatre, only to face confrontations with the police and arrests. The Indian Workers' Association had a meeting planned at the Dominion Theatre the next day – on fascism – where the old and young residents of Southall argued about what needed to be done.[46] Young anti-racists went to the meeting, seeing the IWA as the only credible organisation capable of expressing the desire to confront the state and the racists. Disheartened by the timidity of the older generation, they left determined to found something new.

Within days, a Southall Youth Movement was launched. 'It was the first time young people,' Grover recalls

> mainly Asians but with a sprinkling of African-Caribbean people from Southall, took to the streets and organised themselves as a youth movement against racial violence and police harassment in Southall. The older generation were totally bewildered and fearful of what we were capable of. They were really frightened of what the police would do to us.[47]

In Bradford, the process was similar. In May 1977, the local branch of the Indian Workers' Association created a young members' organisation, the Indian Progressive Youth Organisation. Arguments developed between the younger group and its more cautious parent. At its first AGM a year later, the members renamed it the Asian Youth Movement, breaking the link with the IWA.[48]

The formation of the Race Today Collective goes back to the appointment in November 1973 of Darcus Howe as editor of *Race Today*, then the magazine

of the Institute of Race Relations. Howe was the nephew of the Trinidadian Marxist CLR. James and brought to *Race Today* the distinctive theme of Jamesian socialism, self-activity and participatory democracy, albeit combined with an insistence on the different histories of black and white workers in Britain. The first issue of his editorship was titled, significantly, 'From Victim to Protagonist', and proposed to chart a course not merely for the magazine but for Howe's generation of Caribbean and Asian people in Britain: 'Our task is to record and recognise the struggles of the emerging forces as manifestations of the revolutionary potential of the black population.' *Race Today* became an independent publication, with key contributors including Leila Hassan, Farrukh Dhondy and Linton Kwesi Johnson.[49]

According to Leila Hassan:

> Darcus educated us. Selma James came to speak to us on women's liberation. We had study classes on CLR James's pamphlets on Nkrumah and Every Cook can Govern. We read Karl Marx and we studied the idea of a workers' enquiry . . . We also believed in working class power, when white workers went on strike we supported them but our major thrust was to get a black independent movement going with a black magazine.

In the build-up to the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival, white residents campaigned to have the carnival banned. On the day, Stafford Scott recalls:

> the police decided that they would ignore the stewards and manage the crowds themselves . . . At some point there was a confrontation and a woman was allegedly hit in the stomach by a police officer wielding a truncheon. Whether it was true or not it was enough to turn an already tense situation into a roaring street battle.[50]

Over the next four hours, sixty arrests were made. Afterwards, Darcus Howe was elected chair of the Notting Hill Carnival Development Committee. Black Britain, Howe wrote, was 'no longer willing to live in the room, traipse after the police, do the employer's bidding so that they can create their wealth. We are no longer that defeated, demoralised working-class.'[51]

Darcus Howe and Linton Kwesi Johnson were to play a part in the events of the late 1970s in support of the squatters' movement in Tower Hamlets, as a benign older brother to the AYM in Southall,[52] and as allies of Rock Against Racism.

Notes

1 Dave Hann begins his history of anti-fascism in Britain with the People's Defence League and the National Union for Combating Fascism, both launched in 1924: D. Hann, *Physical Resistance. Or, a Hundred Years of Anti-Fascism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2013), p. 12. Nigel Copsey begins the story one year earlier, with protests against British Fascisti meetings in Hammersmith: N. Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p. 1.

2 The reluctance of the national leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain to be drawn into a conflict with fascists in 1936–1939 and in 1945–1948 is set out in J. Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto: My Youth in the East End, Communism and Fascism 1913–1939* (London: Janet Simon, 1978), pp. 235–269, and in D. Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (London: Macmillan, 1999).
3 M. Beckman, *The Forty Three Group* (London: Centreprise, 1993 edn); Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s*.
4 M. Walker, *The National Front* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 85.
5 'Cyril Paskin', *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 November 2011; S. Silver, 'The fighting sixties', *Searchlight*, July 2002, pp. 11–26.
6 Copsey, *Anti-Fascism*, pp. 111–112. Examples of similar treatment of Jordan's BM appear in P. Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 154–155.
7 Walker, *National Front*, p. 148.
8 W. Asher, 'Fascism in Leicester', *International Socialism* 93 (March 1976), pp. 16–19.
9 'Attack on South Shields anti-fascist', *Red Flag*, 7 November 1974.
10 *DPP v Luft* [1976] UKHL 4, 26 May 1976.
11 D. Renton, *Colour Blind: Race and Migration in North East England since 1945* (Sunderland: University of Sunderland Press, 2007), pp. 162–167.
12 Hann, *Physical Resistance*, pp. 244–245; Copsey, *Anti-Fascism*, p. 117; 'Stop the Nazi Front', Oxford Anti-Fascist Committee leaflet, 1975, copy in Searchlight Archive, University of Northampton, BRI/02/035.
13 A. Skinner, *Cowley Street* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2005), p. 85.
14 N. Fielding, *The National Front* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 165; *Oxford Strumpet* 96 (15 May 1975), p. 1; 'The battle for the streets', *Searchlight*, June 1975.
15 M. Testa, *Militant Anti-Fascism: A Hundred Years of Resistance* (London: AK Press, 2015), p. 329; 'The National Front: an assessment of what is happening', *Searchlight*, November–December 1975.
16 The local police and the Director of Public Prosecutions declined to press charges; however, the UMIST students' union brought a private prosecution. Four of the people who had attacked the room were convicted of threatening behaviour, and a fifth of affray, disorderly conduct and damage to property, resulting in a total sentence of six months: P. Hain, *Political Trials in Britain* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 71.
17 C. Hitchens, 'White socialism', *New Statesman*, 31 May 1974.
18 The Front's politics of Holocaust denial are set out in M. Hobbs, '"The men who rewrite history": Holocaust denial and the British far right since 1967', in N. Copsey and M. Worley (eds), *'Tomorrow Belongs to Us': The British Far Right since 1967* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 9–27, 12–17.
19 Fielding, *The National Front*, p. 52. NF Birmingham Branch, meeting at the Shakespeare [pub], 20 June 1975; H. Redman to J, Tyndall, 'Report of North-East National Front', 9 February 1978, reproduced by Sunderland Anti-Fascist Committee, bulletin, 21 June 1978, Searchlight Archive, BRI/02/29.
20 D. Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot 'n' Race 'n' Rock 'n' Roll* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), p. 27.
21 Labour Party, *Statement by the National Executive Council: Response to the National Front* (London: Labour Party, 1978).
22 E. Smith, *British Communism and the Politics of Race* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 134–137.
23 Hann, *Physical Resistance*, p. 251.
24 A. Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movement* (London: Pluto, 2013), pp. 23, 25; 'A tale of three cities', *Searchlight*, June 1976.
25 Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 38.
26 *Socialist Worker*, 22 May 1976; M. Cottram, 'Keeping in front of the Front: a few ideas on tactics', *IS Bulletin*, September 1976.

27 Hann, *Physical Resistance*, p. 253; Walker, *The National Front*, p. 197; Anon., *The National Front: From the Inside* (London: Union of Jewish Students, 1976), p. 3.
28 J. Fenton, 'An evening with Robert Relf', *New Statesman*, 9 July 1976.
29 'They shall not pass!', *Socialist Worker*, 24 July 1976; P. Alexander, *Racism, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Bookmarks, 1987), p. 154.
30 The text of the leaflet is in D. Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956–1968* (London: Penguin, 1976) pp. 411–412. Barker's recollections of this period have been published online as C. Barker, 'IS in the '60s: May '68 and after', https://rs21.org.uk, 6 August 2015.
31 I. Birchall, *Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time* (London: Bookmarks, 2011), p. 363.
32 'New year horrors list', *Socialist Worker*, 3 January 1976.
33 'The right to work under attack', *Socialist Worker*, 27 March 1976.
34 J. Higgins, *More Years of the Locust* (London: IS Group, 1997).
35 D. Hallas, 'Towards a revolutionary socialist party', in T. Cliff (ed.), *Party and Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1971), pp. 18–35.
36 C. Mullard, *Black Britain* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 145.
37 W. James, 'Reflections on radical history', *Radical History Review* 79 (2001), pp. 99–102.
38 T. Mehmood, *Hand on the Sun* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 25.
39 Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 21.
40 Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 27.
41 The IWA's early history is set out in R. Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto, 2002), pp. 269–273.
42 Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 11.
43 V. Sharma, 'The need for unity', in S. Grover and J. Patel (eds), *Coming of Age: 1976 and the Road to Anti-Racism* (London: The Monitoring Group, 2017), pp. 103–111.
44 P. Alexander and A. Jouhl, 'Organising Asian workers', *Socialist Worker Review*, April–May 1981.
45 *Midweek Gazette*, 3 May 1977.
46 S. Grover, 'Eyes burning in our long eyes', in S. Grover and J. Patel (eds), *Coming of Age: 1976 and the Road to Anti-Racism* (London: The Monitoring Group, 2017), pp. 121–126.
47 K. Puri, 'The pool of blood that changed my life', *BBC News Magazine*, 5 August 2015.
48 Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, p. 36.
49 R. Bunce and P. Field, *Darcus Howe: A Political Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 149–151; James's influence on Howe and the Race Today Collective is apparent in Howe's Preface to M. Busby and D. Howe, *C. L. R. James's 80th Birthday Lectures* (London: RT Publications, 1981), pp. 5–8.
50 S. Scott, 'The uprising that they wish to forget', in S. Grover and J. Patel (eds), *Coming of Age: 1976 and the Road to Anti-Racism* (London: The Monitoring Group, 2017), pp. 161–167; C. Gutzmore, 'The Notting Hill Carnival', *Marxism Today*, August 1982.
51 Widgery, *Beating Time*, pp. 30, 36.
52 Widgery recalls one meeting for Chaggar addressed by Howe, '[w]ho prowled the platform, snarling lucid defiance, superbly sending up the worthies on the stage and insisting, with every pore of his being, that the black communities, Asian and Afro-Caribbean, must set their own agenda, command their own organisations and to themselves be true': Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 30.

4

REGGAE, SOUL, ROCK 'N' ROLL

The later 1970s saw a sustained attempt to use music against racism. It was not the first time that left-wing artists had considered something like this. In 1968, the Merseyside-born anti-war poet Adrian Mitchell gave a radio broadcast comparing the Beatles to the US writer Allen Ginsberg. Mitchell proposed that the Beatles' move from likeable pop to 'adventurous poetry' would be completed if they could release a song taking on the 'lunatic' racism of Enoch Powell. 'If the Beatles applied their considerable wits to a record called Enoch,' Mitchell told his listeners:

> they would be subject to a great deal of hatred. They have taken risks in the past but this would be higher risk . . . [on the other hand, it] might, by amplifying the same chorus of brave voices, mean that the future might be less bad.

Weeks later, Paul McCartney arrived at a Beatles recording session with the first draft of a song. The lyrics were earnest and literal and appear to have antagonised the other Beatles, including John Lennon who was filmed singing them in a series of comic accents. Uncomfortable with the lyrics or with the band's treatment of them and finding himself incapable of writing the sharp political irony that he had intended, McCartney ended up reworking the idea into the band's famous but very different 1969 single, 'Get Back' ('Jojo left his home in Tucson, Arizona / For some California grass / Get back, get back / Get back to where you once belonged').[1] The attempt shows how difficult it is for even radical artists at the height of their powers to turn a political message into compelling art.

A decade later, the problem was not the earnestness of the left but the rhetorical violence of the right. In May 1976, the glam-rock star David Bowie was photographed returning to Victoria Station after two years in North America. Collected in an open-topped Mercedes, Bowie appeared to give his supporters some kind of

open-handed, straight-armed gesture, possibly a fascist salute. Watching journalists from the *New Musical Express* headlined their report, 'Heil and Farewell'.[2] Later that summer, Bowie was interviewed by *Playboy* magazine:

> I think Britain could benefit from a fascist leader. After all, fascism is really nationalism . . . I believe very strongly in fascism, people have always responded with greater efficiency under a regimental leadership . . . Adolf Hitler was one of the first rock stars . . . You've got to have an extreme right front come up and sweep everything off its feet and tidy everything up.[3]

In August 1976, rock guitarist Eric Clapton performed at the Birmingham Odeon. Two years before, Clapton had enjoyed a hit with a cover of Bob Marley's reggae classic, 'I Shot the Sheriff'. He interrupted the Birmingham concert to make a speech supporting Enoch Powell. Members of his audience heard Clapton say:

> I used to be into dope, now I'm into racism. It's much heavier, man. Fucking wogs, man. Fucking Saudis taking over London. Bastard wogs. Britain is becoming overcrowded and Enoch will stop it all send them all back . . . This is England, this is a white country and we don't want any black wogs and coons living here. We need to make clear to them they are not welcome.[4]

The photographer David 'Red' Saunders wrote a reply to Clapton which was published in the *New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker* and *Sounds*:

> When we read about Eric Clapton's Birmingham concert when he urged support for Enoch Powell, we nearly puked.
>
> What's going on, Eric? You've got a touch of brain damage? So you're going to stand for MP and you think we're being colonised by black people. Come on you've been taking too much of that *Daily Express* stuff, you know you can't handle it.
>
> Own up. Half your music is black. You're rock music's biggest colonist. You're a good musician but where would you be without the blues and R&B?
>
> You've got to fight the racist poison, otherwise you degenerate into the sewer with the rats and all the money men who ripped off rock culture with their cheque books and plastic crap.
>
> Rock was and still can be a progressive culture not a package mail order stick-on nightmare of mediocre garbage.
>
> Keep the faith, black and white unite and fight.

> We want to organise a rank and file movement against the racist poison in rock music – we urge support – all those interested please write to Rock Against Racism, Box M, 6 Cotton Gardens, London E2 8DN.
>
> P. S. Who shot the Sheriff Eric? It sure as hell wasn't you![5]

Red Saunders was a great bear of a man who had been given his nickname in honour of his red rockabilly quiff. A photographer and a former mod, Saunders was also a Clapton fan who had bought the guitarist's albums and watched him play live. Saunders had previously acted in Claire and Roland Muldoon's agit-prop theatre group Cartoon Archetype Slogan Theatre, 'famous', as one admirer recalled, 'for its acrobatic style, fast pace and roll-neck black sweaters'.[6] Saunders later left CAST for another radical theatre group, the Kartoon Klowns. In summer 1976, the Klowns were rehearsing a play, *Yes, but: Socialism or Barbarism* and it was among this group that Saunders found his first allies.[7] According to Saunders:

> I was just a working photographer and then the art got to me, typography, Rodchenko's posters, Mayakovsky's poetry. I was educated by the theatre group CAST, it was the rock on which everything was based . . . So that we would be reading Preobrazhensky this week, right, then we're off to see the Prague Theatre of the Black and then it's *The Crime of M. Lange* at the Kilburn Grange. It trained you for cultural fanaticism. We'd go back to the flat, eat sardines on toast, get herbed up and analyse it all night.[8]

Several hundred people responded to RAR's letter,[9] as Saunders recalls:

> After the letter appeared, people came back and contacted us . . . Our attitude was always, if you'd like to get involved do it. One guy called up from Aberystwyth. I said, 'Right, you're the RAR Aberystwyth committee.' He said, 'Can't you help?' I said, 'No, I've only got two rolls of Sellotape and that's it.'

RAR Central meetings began at the studio which Red Saunders shared at 41 Great Windmill Street in Soho with another photographer, Gered Mankowitz. The meetings were open to all, sometimes with thirty people or more in attendance, including musicians, fans, writers and artists. Within a year, the meetings became so packed, and letters and RAR gigs so numerous, that an elected committee was required in order to organise effectively.[10] According to Gregory:

> Red had this big studio, this big enormous space. We didn't have to hire anywhere. On the walls, there were his and Gered's photos. Meetings were long, sometimes two, three hours. They weren't structured, they were just people sitting around a long table and putting in ideas. We were interested in doing. It was about music, it was about activity. There was a lot of laughter, sometimes shouting. We had this burning desire for change.

When the campaign started Saunders was at its heart, as Syd Shelton recalls:

> Red would turn up at three in the morning and he always had this big Bellingham camera bag. He'd pull it out and there'd be a couple of bottles of beer and a sandwich and he'd go 'This is wonderful' . . . He could motivate people to do things who maybe wouldn't have done it without him.[11]

Chris Bolton and Clarence Baker from reggae band Misty in Roots attended the London RAR meetings. Other reggae groups pledging their support to the emergent campaign included the Cimarons, Steel Pulse, Aswad and Black Slate. Saunders' studio, with its red plywood sofa and a coffee table made from a Kodak rotary print dryer was soon too small to seat all those who wanted to take part.

Kate Webb was just 17 years old and a Tom Robinson fan. She was working in the hat and glove department at Debenhams when she attended her first RAR meeting. Fired up by the way the older campaigners dropped in to the conversation names such as Toussaint L'Ouverture, Alexandra Kollontai and Kurt Weill, Webb quit her job at Debenhams and became RAR's first full-time worker, based in an office at Clerkenwell near the Marx Memorial Library.

The musician Tom Robinson also took part:

> All these international rock superstars, Eric Clapton, David Bowie giving the fascist salute, even Rod Stewart declared 'Enoch's our man', all these people had made their living out of black music. I made up my mind to do everything I could to help.

Another member of the RAR London committee was Dave Widgery, a GP in Limehouse, a former editor of the magazine *Oz* and a member of the IS/SWP's informal dissident wing. Born in 1947, Widgery had been a victim of the 1956 polio epidemic and suffered five years of reconstructive operations, graduating as he put it, 'from wheelchair and callipers to my first pair of shop-bought shoes'. He was trapped with other children on a hospital ward, 'crying, as I so clearly remember, ourselves to sleep at night with our nurses in tears at their inability to comfort us'.[12]

At age 15, Widgery read Jack Kerouac's great novel *On the Road* and discovered in it 'a coded message of discontent'. Later, he would write that Neal Cassady, the hero of the novel, was the 'Leon Trotsky of his time'. Widgery bunked off from school to listen to jazz bands at the Rikki-Tik club in Windsor. He was expelled from his grammar school for publishing an unauthorised magazine, *Rupture*. At 18, he interviewed the American radical poet Allen Ginsberg.[13] He arrived in the States just as Watts, the black district of Los Angeles, exploded in riots. Widgery journeyed to Cuba and later to the West Coast, taking part in anti-Vietnam protests called by members of Students for a Democratic Society.[14]

Widgery describes how jazz and reggae shaped his and his friends' lives:

> Black music was our catechism, not just something we listened to in our spare time. It was the culture which woke us up, had shaped us and kept us up all night, blocked in the Wardour Street mod clubs, fanatical on the Thames Valley R&B circuit, queuing all down Gerrard Street to see Roland Kirk in Ronnie Scott's old basement. It was how we worked out our geography, learnt our sexuality and taught ourselves history.
>
> There was no question of slumming or inverted snobbery, we went for black music because it was so strong rhythmically, there was a passion in it, it was about life and had some point to it. And if white musicians were as good and as exciting (as George Fame, Alexis Kormer and the early Stones certainly were) we worshipped them too.[15]

'It took to the end of 1976', as Widgery recalls:

> For the little RAR group to hammer out its ideas and consolidate a core of visual artists, musicians and writers who could drive the project ahead. But for that group the feeling of fear and passivity against the Front's advance was over, at least in our heads; we were going to strike back kung-fu, rub-a-dub, surrealist style.[16]

The first RAR gig took place at the Princess Alice pub in Forest Gate in November 1976, with blues singer Carol Grimes and the London Boogie Band playing. According to Grimes, 'One day, Red came knocking on my door. He was quite a big man and my house was like a doll's house.'[17] To advertise the concert, RAR spray-painted an image onto a massive plain white sheet, photographed it and then reduced the image to a flier – only forgetting to include the time of the gig.

Security was put on by the Royal Group of Docks Shop Stewards Committee, Micky Fenn, Bob Light and their friends. Widgery describes the dockers arriving with a bulky Adidas bag and the words, 'Not to worry, the tools are here.'[18]

A second gig saw Grimes' London Boogie Band perform alongside reggae act Matumbi and the saxophonist Mike Hobart's soul band Limousine. Fred Rath reviewed the gig for *Black Echoes*, praising 'Dave Brooks, playing sax like a reincarnated King Curtis', and concluded:

> I'm not sure of the role that politics takes but I'm sure that the Socialist Workers who got this thing on, will realise that racial harmony is far more important than any political party. The venture deserves support from anybody who cares.[19]

The graphic designer Dave King came up with a RAR logo, a five-cornered star in the style of the old Communist red star for the five continents but with curved lines to make the image softer, smoother and cast within a circle representing unity.

RAR held its first conference at North London Polytechnic in January 1977, recalled by Widgery as 'a caboodle of oddballs who were going to work together . . . more explosively than the worthies of the conventional anti-racist platforms'.[20]

The next RAR benefit was held at the Roundhouse on 1 May 1977, with Carol Grimes inviting her friends Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding from the Jimi Hendrix Experience and Paul Jones from Manfred Mann to perform and Red Saunders booking reggae band Aswad. The foyer was filled with union banners, while Saunders' colleague Gered Mankowitz, the photographer for the Rolling Stones' album *Between the Buttons*, bathed the stage in Jamaican green, black and yellow light.

It was at around this time that Rock Against Racism approached the poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, inviting him to take part in the campaign. He in turn asked his comrades on the Race Today Collective. Leila Hassan recalls that Darcus Howe, *Race Today*'s editor and Dave Widgery of RAR had been friends for several years:

> They disagreed a lot but they would have discussions. Darcus liked Widgery. Race Today had regular big heavy parties. You'd meet people in social gatherings and because of the moment you'd always be discussing politics. I remember Darcus and Dave talking about CLR James and the vanguard party.

The message came back to Johnson, yes, this was an initiative which he should support.

Johnson recalls the suspicion which some of his friends felt towards Rock Against Racism: 'We didn't subscribe to their position on blacks and Asians who they saw as victims. Victims are people who don't fight back . . . That was soon dispelled when we saw the effectiveness of what they were doing.'[21]

The first issue of a RAR fanzine, *Temporary Hoarding*, appeared in November 1976. Lucy Whitman explains the name: 'Everywhere you went there were lots of bill posters all over these boarded-up buildings. There was the idea that everything was very immediate and wouldn't last long.'[22] The first issue contained an A3 poster of the Clash with the lyrics of White Riot: 'All the power is in the hands of the people rich enough to buy it.' A second poster showed a family watching a Front march on television: 'Don't sit back and watch it . . . smash racism!' The editorial demanded: 'Rebel music, street music. Music that breaks down people's fear of one another. Crisis music. Now music. Music that knows who the real enemy is.'

Three designers on *Temporary Hoarding* worked in the SWP printshop and others contributed from outside the SWP, including Andy Dark, Jo Wreford, Darla-Jane Gilroy and Rick Fawcett. Ruth Gregory had worked on the left press in Sydney:

> In Australia, everything was hot metal. By the time I came here, the technology had moved on. It was all artwork straight to camera. The new machines gave us more freedom, suddenly design was accessible to more people. It was part of punk, you could tear things up, you could print from anything.

Gregory describes the part played by Saunders:

> Red was taller than anyone else. He used to come in and talk to his friends about music, Red was totally inclusive. I don't remember him as a leader. He was encouraging; he was interested in meeting new people. He'd talk to people about what they were doing, he'd do that to everyone and make them feel like they were part of something. If someone was involved in Temporary Hoarding, he'd insist that they got a credit. He'd insist on writing in everyone's names at the final edit.

There was every contrast between the artistic license Gregory had in designing *Temporary Hoarding* and the limits of her day job. Gregory recalls working at the printshop on a poster and being instructed by Jim Nichol, the SWP's national secretary and the manager of the SWP printshop, to tone down the design. 'A poster', he told her, 'has to be able to be read from the top of a bus.' *Socialist Worker was* a conventional-looking tabloid, similar in design if not politics to the *Daily Mirror* or the *Daily Express*. When it came to *Temporary Hoarding*, Gregory had a free licence to express her imagination. 'It's like cooking,' she says, 'either you follow a recipe exactly or you take the ingredients and make something new.'

Shelton, Gregory and other Rock Against Racism designers employed a typographic style which may have seemed reminiscent of the punk fanzines, but looked deeper into the history of design, experimenting with layout, colour and showing the influences of Dada, the constructivists and Weimar artist John Heartfield.

The writing was also bolder and more chaotic than standard left journalism. Scathing, ironic and deadly serious beneath a humorous facade and relying on a free associational style, Dave Widgery's essay for the first issue of *Temporary Hoarding*, 'What is Racism', linked the rise of the NF to the racism of the state:

> Racism is as British as Biggles and baked beans. You grow up anti-black, with the golliwogs in the jam, *The Black and White Minstrel Show* on TV and CSE dumbo history at school. Racism is about Jubilee mugs and Rule Britannia and how we won the War. Gravestones, bayonets, forced destruction of the culture of India and Africa was regrettable of course. But without our Empire, the world's inhabitants would still be rolling in the mud, wouldn't they? . . . [Racism] would be pathetic if it hadn't killed and injured and brutalised so many lives and if it wasn't starting all over again . . .
>
> The problem is not just the new fascists from the old slime, a master race whose idea of heroism is ambushing single blacks in darkened streets. These private attacks whose intention, to cow and brutalise, won't work if the community they seek to terrorise instead organises itself. But when the state backs up racialism, it's different. Outwardly respectable but inside fired with the same mentality and the same fears, the bigger danger is the racist magistrates with their cold sneering authority, the immigration men who mock an Asian mother as she gives birth to a dead child on their office floor, policemen for whom answering back is a crime.[23]

Soon, *Temporary Hoarding* was selling 12,000 copies per issue; making it the best-selling of the remaining punk fanzines.[24]

At the heart of Rock Against Racism was an alliance between political activists and a small number of reggae and punk musicians. There was nothing automatic about the connection between politics and music. Reggae was widely derided on the left as a macho, even misogynist artform. As for punk, the term was barely older than RAR itself, with the first punk singles, The Damned's 'New Rose' and the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy in the UK', having just been released in October and November 1976.

Few people on the British left had a sense of how political (in the broadest sense)[25] this new scene was. Before punk, the dominant approach on the left had been to look for socialist politics in the folk songs of the distant past.[26] In Britain and the US, left-wing artists modelled themselves on the nineteenth-century singing tramps. In Ewan MacColl's words, 'I became convinced . . . we should be pursuing some kind of national identity, not just becoming an arm of American cultural imperialism.'[27] The avowed socialist politics of artists like Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and Ewan MacColl was used to justify the claim that the only left-wing music was folk music. The notion that folk music was more inherently radical than more recent forms underpinned the controversy at Bob Dylan's May 1966 gig at the Manchester Free Trade Hall when Dylan went electric and members of the audience shouted 'Judas' at him.

These older arguments were brought into the debate around punk. Maoist composer Cornelius Cardew maintained that punk was 'fascist . . . The monopoly capitalist class consciously selects for promotion the most reactionary element of culture', an argument Cardew proved to his own satisfaction by showing the Clash's use of Union Jacks and photographs of police charging black rioters.[28]

Lucy Whitman, writing as Lucy Toothpaste in her fanzine *JOLT* found herself at an event on Marxism and music put on by the IMG. The speaker, Leon Rosselson, was the writer of such radical folk classics as 'Don't Get Married Girls'. To Whitman's disappointment, Rosselson dismissed all amplified music:

> He argued that rock music is incapable of being a revolutionary force because 1) you can never hear the lyrics if the music is loud, so radical messages are wasted 2) the industry is entirely controlled by money . . . Folk music was the only revolutionaries could make use of because according to him folk clubs bypass the worst of the music industry.[29]

While the left was deprecating punk, others on the right were taking an interest. The North American conservative magazine *National Review* sent its reviewer Edward Meadows to the UK to study the punk phenomenon. With the one limited exception Meadows argued of the Jam (who he decided, were Conservatives) 'The groups lean toward the National Front'. 'New Wave' (i.e. punk), he told his readers was 'at base, right-wing political protest . . . born and bred of rage against the Labour Party, the Board of Trade, the unions and long-haired hippy-dippy rich-kid poseurs who don't have to worry because they've got it made'.[30]

The examples chosen by the likes of Cardew or Meadows were more complex than they realised. The Jam had indeed told one interviewer they would vote Conservative; the following year, Paul Weller withdrew the comment.[31] Not long afterwards, the Jam released 'Down in the Tube Station at Midnight', a blistering account of an attack by a National Front supporter as experienced by its victim. The reason the Clash used photographs of police clashing with black youth was because members of the band had grown up in west London, had watched the police attack the Notting Hill Carnival and identified with the black rioters.

Punk is best understood as a disobedient music form, capable of nourishing either left- or right-wing politics. Indeed, you could see this ambiguity[32] even in the history of individual bands. The Sex Pistols were capable of releasing 'God Save the Queen'. The same band also released 'Belsen Was a Gas', with its description of the open graves 'where all the Jews lay' and its intended comic chorus 'Oh dear / oh dear'. If the first song would fit into any list of the top ten protest records in British history, the second had nothing to say about the Holocaust. The band's sympathetic historian Greil Marcus calls the song 'crude, cheesy, stupid . . . a piece of shit'.[33]

Another punk act, Adam and the Ants, released a single, 'Puerto Rican', which offered to 'light up a beacon on a Puerto Rican'. In an interview with *Temporary Hoarding*'s Lucy Toothpaste (Lucy Whitman), formerly of *JOLT*,[34] Adam defended their song:

> The story is about a white woman who has actually got a pet Puerto Rican. I saw [Alex Haley's] *Roots* and what shocked me in that wasn't the slavery, wasn't the conditions, it was when that guy went into the black slave community and they said to him, 'Look, we're animals' – they'd accepted being fucking animals . . . My song is about a white woman who has reduced a human being to dog status – because I thought that was a damn sight more powerful in a lyric than saying look at those poor Puerto Ricans.

Toothpaste took Adam and the Ants to task for their naivety and challenged the way some of their songs drew on the 'decadent' imagery associated with Nazi Germany. Adam was indignant at the very suggestion that he could possibly support Nazism or the National Front ('I hate Nazis. My parents are Romany Gypsies you know'), but did not accept that there was anything problematic about writing songs which appeared to get an erotic thrill out of imagery associated with the Nazis.[35]

The interview appeared in *Temporary Hoarding* surrounded by a margin of sexist and anti-sexist images. In the top left-hand corner, the photographs included images for Neil Diamond and Sweet albums with women bending over and showing their underwear. In the bottom right-hand corner was the resistance, a Reclaim the Night protest, campaigns for women's refuges, Jayaben Desai on a Grunwick picket line. '[The Ants] were unable to engage with the debate,' Whitman recalls, 'other than to repeat they were nice people and didn't mean any harm.' Despite

her doubts, the RAR booked the Ants to play benefits.[36] 'It was better to have them inside the tent.'

The audience for punk was the first generation of young people since the war to see their life-chances diminish. At its best, punk taught them to resist. As the journalist Caroline Coon wrote in *Melody Maker*:

> The musicians and their audience reflect each other's street cheap ripped-apart, pinned-together style of dress . . . The kids are arrogant, aggressive, rebellious . . . Punk rock sounds simple and callow. It's meant to. The equipment is minimal, usually cheap. It's played faster than the speed of light . . . No indulgent improvisations . . . Participation is the operative word.[37]

The fanzine *Sideburns* drew an A, an E and a G chord: 'This is a chord, this is another, this is a third. Now form a band.'[38] At moments such as the Pistols' concert at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester (attended by fewer than fifty people but including future members of Buzzcocks, the Smiths and Joy Division), the membrane between performer and audience was stretched so tight that the audience could almost walk through.[39]

Punk was played in a register that veered between anger and foreboding, whether in the Clash's 'London Calling', with its language of war declared and battle coming down, the Ruts' 'Babylon's Burning' or Elvis Costello's 'Less Than Zero', with its images of 'Mister Oswald with the swastika tattoo', plainly Oswald Mosley.

The Sex Pistols were arrogant, destructive and utterly mercenary. Viv Albertine, later of the Slits, heard them playing in a school hall. They were '[l]oud and raucous,' she recalls, 'it's the singer who stands out. Johnny Rotten slouches at the front of the stage . . . sneers at us in his ordinary North London accent, his voice isn't trained and tuneful, it's a whiny cynical drawl.'[40] Rotten told *Temporary Hoarding*'s Dave Widgery that he despised the Front: 'No one should have the right to tell anyone they can't live here because of the colour of their skin.'[41]

The Clash dressed in black battle uniforms stencilled with Caribbean phrases, copying at different times the look of black Jamaican street style: narrow trousers, black brogues, even the pork pie hat. The comedian Mark Steel, then a young punk living in the suburbs, recalls listening to his first Clash album: 'While the lyrics were indecipherable, the meaning boomed out of the chipboard speakers and echoed around the Swanley walls. It was all right to be angry. You be angry, mate. There's a whole generation of us.'[42] The future musician Julian Cope, then a mere foot-soldier of the Liverpool punk scene, recalls seeing the Clash at Eric's, during the band's White Riot tour:

> It was as cartoony as the Ramones but blazing with colour. And they all moved in rigid formation . . . The club burned on free energy for the rest of the night. All the right-on guys loved Strummer. All the women wanted to fuck Simonon.[43]

Rock Against Racism related to an audience of punks, yet the punk scene itself was in constant change. Soon the Pistols were breaking up and new bands were coming to the fore including the Clash and Tom Robinson. Others, including the Mekons, the Ruts and the Gang of Four started out at RAR benefits. Music and politics worked together, as RAR poet Steven 'Seething' Wells recalls:

> Punk wouldn't have had so much impact outside London without the anti-fascist movement but then the anti-fascist movement would not have had so much impact without punk. In Leeds, where the Young National Front were really strong, some of the early punks had formed fascist groups like the Dentists and the Ventz. Punk was apolitical in that context; many people saw it as fascistic even though Martin Webster came out against it. RAR caused punk to make real contact there – the time when most people see punk as being diluted was the time when it was gaining substance.[44]

The music papers were at the height of their influence. By the end of the 1970s, the combined sales of *Sounds*, *Melody Maker*, *NME* and *Record Mirror* was over 600,000 a week.[45] Indeed as the likes of the *NME* turned towards radical politics, their circulation grew. The coverage of RAR was continuous. A typical *Sounds* issue featured a dozen black musicians from George Csapo of Bethnal to Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex and Arri Up of the Slits, their faces stamped with the word 'Deported!'.[46]

Outside its circle of young followers, punk was a despised, reviled sub-culture, seen by millions of older people as disrespectful. 'No subculture has sought, with more grim determination than the punks,' sociologist Dick Hebdidge wrote, 'to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval.'[47] When the Sex Pistols toured the UK, twelve of their nineteen gigs were banned and the band was confronted at Caerphilly by crowds of Christians waving placards and singing carols at the rebellious youth. 'I think it's disgusting the way these punks sing about violence all the time,' complained Radio 1 DJ Tony Blackburn. 'Why can't they sing about beautiful things like trees and flowers?' In July 1977, following the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the band's boat-tour along the Thames with 'God Save the Queen' playing, Bernard Brook-Partridge of the Greater London Council announced that the Pistols were banned from all GLC venues.[48] A week later, Mecca announced that no punk gigs would be allowed at any of their venues. Virtually all major concert halls followed suit, a censorship 'unprecedented', according to Caroline Coon, 'in the entire history of rock'.[49]

Paul Cook of the Sex Pistols and Johnny Rotten were attacked in the street.[50] Indeed, this hostility was extended even to punk's most junior, local supporters. In an interview with *The Mirror*, two punks Jean Mahoney and Dough Stowe complained that they were under constant police surveillance. 'It's just our clothes,' they said, 'nothing else.' According to John Robb, later a bass guitarist with the Membranes, 'Everyone involved can recall beatings being handed out by members of the public . . . You didn't have to look that punk to get attacked.'[51]

By summer 1977, the first generation of punks were being replaced by new generations of supporters. Some were young and middle class, with the spare money to buy into the style. According to one participant, George Marshall:

> When it became High Street fashion with High Street price tags, it also became the preserve of those who could afford it rather than those who could feel it. Buying a pair of ready-made bondage trousers for thirty quid down the King's Road could hardly be chalked up as one in the eye for the system. And neither could paying a fiver for a ripped bin liner.[52]

Yet the opposite dynamic was at work outside the capital, with punk winning an audience among young working-class people, whether in work or still in education.

Part of the punk instinct was the urge to shock an older generation for whom the defining moment of British history was the Second World War. The critique was one which Rock Against Racism shared: the 'gravestones, bayonets and forced starvation' which in Widgery's words linked the wartime effort to the British Empire. Yet punk's critique of British imperial myth-making was shallow. It went little further than pointing at the older generation and goading them.

Several punk bands took their name from moments in fascist history, including RAR supporters Joy Division, named after the brothels which the SS maintained in its extermination camps.[53] After Ian Curtis's death, they became New Order, another name derived from the Nazi past. Other bands to reflect this history included Blitzkrieg, Martin and the Brownshirts, Stormtrooper, the Stukas, Warsaw, Zyklon B and even London SS, whose stick-thin guitarist with fluffy backcombed hair[54] was Mick Jones, later of RAR mainstays, the Clash.

Numerous early punk bands were photographed wearing iron crosses, SS insignia, or swastikas.[55] At the start of the punk movement, the Sex Pistols were invited onto the Bill Grundy show and goaded by the older man's flirting with Siouxsie Sioux ('We'll meet afterwards, shall we?'). They answered by swearing at him live: 'You dirty sod, you dirty old man . . . You dirty bastard'.[56] The press coverage focused on their profanity, with *The Mirror*'s account headlined 'The Filth and the Fury'. No one seemed to notice the orange-haired Simon Barker, standing beside Bill Grundy, his swastika armband in full view. It wasn't just Barker who wore a swastika; other members of the Pistols and their entourage, Siouxsie Sioux, Soo Cat Woman and Sid Vicious were all photographed repeatedly with the image, earning the ire of Lucy Toothpaste in her early punk fanzine *JOLT*.[57] The Damned's Captain Sensible was photographed in a swastika armband,[58] as were Jimmy Pursey of Sham 69 and Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols. 'I'm not a racist and never have been,' Jones later wrote, 'I suppose it was just a way of summing up the darkness I felt.'[59]

To this day, Siouxsie insists that nothing more was intended by the wearing of swastikas than simply getting back at the older generation:

> There was that film, the Damned and everyone who saw it thought it looked great . . . There was nothing coming out about what went on in the concentration camps . . . I became aware when skinheads latched on to it and took it quite seriously and it was used politically and started talking about race and I thought what? . . . I thought fuck off, no way.[60]

Beyond the swastika, there were other parts of punk's aesthetic which were amenable to fascist politics. The sound of early punk, with its jagged three-chord repetitions, was the antithesis of reggae or dub. With the exception of a tiny number of black artists who were accepted in the punk scene (such as Don Letts, DJ at the Roxy and a friend of the Clash or Barry Adamson, bassist with Manchester band Magazine), it was an overwhelmingly white scene.

The demise of bands like the Pistols created a space some of which was taken by a revival of the late-1960s smartly dressed, reggae-following skinhead subculture. It was here that punk's flirtation with fascism held. A number of skinheads sided with the NF – not all, not a majority, but enough to be noticed. One skinhead writing for the RAR magazine *Temporary Hoarding* spoke in negative terms about their own scene:

> skinheads, not the punk spill-over of now but the real thing . . . hated hippies, pretended to hate blacks and were desperate for some positive ideology to give the movement permanence. None came – we never had any heroes. No movies to attach ourselves to, not even our own music – we nicked reggae from the blacks.[61]

The skinhead style, as Dick Hebdidge points out, was open to black influences:

> It was . . . through consorting with West Indians at the local youth clubs and on the street corners, by copying *their* mannerisms, adopting *their* curses, dancing to *their* music that the skinheads "magically recovered" their lost sense of working-class community.

And yet this seeming -idealisation of one black culture did not extend to an anti-racist consciousness – for some it did, but not for most.[62]

Soon there was a post-Pistols sound: slower and heavier than the first punk acts, watered-down beer compared to their predecessor's amphetamine buzz. Among the most popular of the skinhead bands was Sham 69. Among the band's roadies were two supporters of the far right, Glen Bennett and Kev Wells.[63] According to the skinhead scene's historian George Marshall:

> Lyrics to [Sham 69] songs like 'Borstal Breakout' and 'If the Kids are United' might look simple and naïve on paper but they weren't being entered into a sixth form poetry competition anyway. And it's only when played live that they genuinely come into their own and sound as sharp

> as any Stanley blade. The pride and passion with which Jimmy [Pursey] belted out his three minute masterpieces and the way every word was unanimously echoed by the crowd, is what it's all about. And going to Sham 69 was about being part of something, a part of probably the best band ever to tell it as it was on the streets.[64]

Fighting between Pursey's fascist and anti-fascist followers disrupted several of his gigs including those held under a Rock Against Racism banner. But Pursey saw his band and its supporters as a family. He refused to denounce his followers. He was going to convert them; whether they liked it or not.

The typical RAR running order was split in two: a white and a black band. According to Red Saunders:

> It very quickly became our thing to mix up the bands. We had to have black bands on stage . . . Putting black and white bands together broke down the fear. One of the most wondrous gigs we did was at Hackney Town Hall [in August 1977]. We had the reggae band The Cimarons on with the punk act Generation X. Everyone jammed together at the end. It became the blueprint.[65]

There had of course been bands before that had tried to fuse black and white sounds. What was different now was the extent of the fusion. In 1970s London, there was no significant white audience for black music. RAR bands set out to break through this barrier. Nicky Tesco of the Members remembers playing alongside Misty in Roots at RAR gigs and sharing instruments. Jake Burns of Stiff Little Fingers recalls that 'RAR's raising of cultural awareness meant more and more people started experimenting with the type of bill to put on'.

The Clash recorded 'Police and Thieves', a cover of Junior Murvin's reggae track and also Willie Williams' 'Armagideon Time'. They also hired a black producer, Lee Perry and wrote perhaps their greatest song, 'White Man in Hammersmith Palais'. The sound is noticeably slower than 'White Riot', with the bass turned up. The narrator is the only white man at a reggae night. Looking for an evening of authentic political music, he senses that everyone else is there for entertainment. This apathy, the narrator insists, is tolerant even of fascism, using an image that recalls Bowie's far-right flirtation in 1976: 'If Adolf Hitler flew in today, they'd send a limousine anyway.' The words of the song move to unease, even despair, while the music of the song takes up the pauses and missed-beats of reggae, subverting the lyrics.

The Ruts also tried to fuse reggae and punk, while Siouxsie and the Banshees, having worn swastikas, now wrote 'Metal Postcard', influenced by the collages of the German anti-fascist Johnny Heartfield. 'Metal is tough,' Siouxsie sang, 'metal will sheen. Metal won't rust when oiled and cleaned.'

In the alliance between reggae and punk, Ruth Gregory recalls, all the authority belonged to the former:

> The reggae artists were such skilled musicians, with a strong sense of who they were. If you listen to Aswad's Concrete Slave Ship it carries such a great sense of who the performers are. The punks weren't nearly so clear. They were the first generation of unskilled workers, everything they were brought up to believe had all disappeared. If you listen to Gang of Four's 'At Home He's a Tourist', it captures that sense that nothing is where it should be.

Meanwhile, RAR also helped create a space for a number of punk-feminist bands, including X-Ray Spex, whose debut single opened with 20-year-old part-Somali part-Scottish-Irish frontwoman Poly Styrene briefly saying in awful, coy, voice, 'Some people say that little girls should be seen and not heard', before screaming rejuvenated into her microphone, 'Oh Bondage, up yours.'

In summer 1977, Caroline Harper was living in a squat in London. She heard about the first RAR gigs and was attracted by the music and its anti-establishment feel, but she described herself as 'unpolitical' or 'an anarchist':

> It was part of our culture, living in London as punks. We were getting harassed by the police. We naturally identified with other people getting harassed by the police . . . It didn't matter if you had green hair or were black, you would be stopped by the police, for any reason . . . .

From 1977, voices could be found all across London insisting that punk had died. But through summer and autumn 1977 and into the following year a new infrastructure was being created as punk evolved, with new labels being launched: Fast Product, Rough Trade, Postcard, Factory and Mute.

Meanwhile, Rock Against Racism groups were being set up in increasing numbers outside London. In Leeds, Paul Furness, Dave Bash and Ian Williams organised regular performances at the Polytechnic student union, starting with a one-off performance by the band Foxy Maiden and building up to weekly performances by the likes of the Mekons, Gang of Four and Delta 5.[66]

In Birmingham, RAR was set up after a letter in local magazine *Broadside* called for volunteers. The group ran a weekly club night at Digbeth Civic Hall and were supported by West Midlands post-punk band the Au Pairs. Sheryl Garratt recalls an evening when skinheads danced to soul classic 'Liquidator', while chanting 'British Movement, British Movement'. Garratt confronted them, indicated the music and said, 'Do you know what colour these people are?' The skinheads stopped chanting, remained and at the end of the evening one of the organisers gave them a lift home: 'They were National Front in the same way as I was left-wing. It was like a vague unease that things weren't right and life wasn't fair.'[67]

In Deptford, RAR was a collaboration with the Combination Theatre Group and bands Eddie and the Hot Rods, Menace and Amber. In Lymington ('the most boring place in the world'), RAR held a first gig with the band Criminally Insane. On Merseyside, a carnival was organised jointly with the local Anti-Racist Alliance, with 4,000 people turning out. In Nottingham, organisers described

themselves as breaking from a 'populist, mediocre' local Anti-Nazi League. Gigs were performed at the town's one punk venue, the Sandpiper.[68]

Hull RAR brought out its own fanzine, *Official Secrets*, and held events at the Spring Bank Community Centre on Wellington Lane. The bands who performed are a list of ephemeral and local acts and none the worse for it: the Tar Babies, Mental Block, Nyam Nyam, the Posers, Red Stripe, My Silent War. Probably the best known were Akrylyk Vyktymz, a group of undergraduates from Hull's art college who saw themselves as socialists and who once supported the Clash at Bridlington Spa. Their saxophonist Roland Gift later played with the Fine Young Cannibals.[69]

Several of Rock Against Racism's early members were also members of IS/SWP. Yet even within RAR, the SWP were a minority. They were well represented among the writers and graphic designers, but only a tiny number of the musicians and performers. Kate Webb, RAR's first paid worker, was interviewed by *Sounds*: 'I don't know how many times we've got to say it but RAR is completely independent. I'm not an SWP member, other people aren't. In fact most aren't.'[70]

Moreover, the Socialist Workers Party members in Rock Against Racism were drawn from a particular layer. They were active members of the party, loyal but far from the most orthodox of Leninists. Syd Shelton worked in the SWP print-shop but saw one of his tasks as keeping his comrades away from RAR: 'The SWP did supply troops on the ground: people to put out leaflets; put up posters; sell badges and fanzines. We were really grateful for their contribution but it was very important that we had no party politics.' Indeed, several of them were in the process of leaving the SWP, including Syd Shelton, Ruth Gregory[71] and Nigel Fountain.

Supporters of the SWP also disagreed among themselves in analysing the new movement. Because RAR was aimed at a young audience, not at existing socialists, some SWP members regarded it with suspicion. John Shemeld from south London was one of them: 'I was thirty and conscious of my age.' The Rock Against Racism paper *Temporary Hoarding* relayed left ideas in a more radical format. The look relied on collage, images and irony. Not everyone liked it. Colin Fancy was an 18-year-old member of the Deptford Rock Against Racism group. Although his parents were in the SWP, Fancy declined to join that party. He thought that *Temporary Hoarding* was too political for its own good and not enough of a fanzine: 'I was a music press and fanzine reader and I wanted to read interviews with bands . . . I wasn't going to read an article about internment, whatever that meant.'

Red Saunders recalls showing a copy of *Temporary Hoarding* to the SWP's founder Tony Cliff, who found the artwork incomprehensible and tried to read the magazine upside down. Ignoring the politics and moving the conversation back to more familiar topics, Cliff told Saunders off for being overweight.[72]

Ruth Gregory of the London RAR committee insists that the group operated in a 'collective, bottom-up fashion. For the Punk and Reggae bands, hierarchy smelled of oppression and we felt pretty much the same.'[73] She describes negotiating with

leading members of the SWP and compares the experience to 'arguing with your parents'. Red Saunders recalls negotiations with his 'uncles' in the left groups, 'But even I could see that there were limits to what RAR could do on its own.'

Notes

1 P. Doggett, *There's a Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars and the Rise and Fall of '60s Counterculture* (London: Canongate, 2007), p. 197; A. Mitchell, 'Beatles', *Listener*, 3 October 1968.
2 T. Stewart, 'Heil and farewell', *New Musical Express*, 8 May 1976, p. 9.
3 C. Crowe, 'Candid conversation', *Playboy*, September 1976. Bowie, unlike Eric Clapton, later offered a full apology.
4 D. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain 1974–1979* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 587; I. Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 18; D. Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge* (London: Picador, 2016), p. 13. At the time of writing, Clapton's explanation was that his mind was disturbed by excessive drug-taking – 'I was so ashamed of who I was, a kind of semi-racist, which didn't make sense. Half of my friends were black': D. Sanderson, 'Drugs "turned Eric Clapton racist"', *The Times*, 13 January 2018.
5 'Rock Against Racism', *Socialist Worker*, 2 October 1976.
6 D. Widgery, *Preserving Disorder* (London: Pluto, 1989), p. 201.
7 Of the letter's signatories, four were Klowns (Saunders, Peter Bruno, Jo Wreford and Angela Follett), another was Saunders' agent Mike Stadler, the sixth a friend (an arts student and jeweller Dave Courts).
8 S. Frith and J. Street, 'Rock Against Racism and Red Wedge: from music to politics, from politics to music', in R. Garofalo (ed.), *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements* (Boston, MA: South End Press), pp. 67–81, 76.
9 Including the future journalist and broadcaster Rod Liddle, then living on Teesside. 'I am 16 and where politics are concerned am left wing, also the biggest love of my life is rock music . . . I should like to help in any way I can.' Rock Against Racism poster, 'Musicians . . . fans . . . we need you', Bishopsgate Institute archive, LHM 128.
10 A December 1978 list provided that the RAR committee comprised Jo Wreford, Syd Shelton, Ruth Hotpinkheart (i.e. Gregory), Robert Galvin, Dave Widgery, Irate Kate (Webb), Jane Harrison, John Dennis and Red Saunders: Rock Against Racism, 'Dub Conference', leaflet (1979?), p. 4.
11 R. Huddle and R. Saunders (eds), *Reminiscences of RAR* (London: Redwords, 2016), p. 216.
12 D. Widgery, *The National Health: A Radical Perspective* (London: Hogarth Press, 1988), pp. xiv, xv, 56.
13 D. Widgery, 'Interview with Allen Ginsberg', *U – University & College Magazine* 3(7), October 1965.
14 R. Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake: The Dreams, the Trips, the Trials, the Love-ins, the Screw-ups . . . the Sixties* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), pp. 173, 271; N. Fountain, *Underground: The London Alternative Press* (London and New York: Comedia, 1988), p. 43; J. Green (ed.), *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961–1971* (London: Minerva, 1988), p. 65.
15 D. Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot 'n' Race 'n' Rock and Roll* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), p. 56; also Widgery, *Preserving Disorder*, pp. 76–87, 206–210.
16 Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 43.
17 Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down*, p. 17.
18 Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 45.
19 *Black Echoes*, 20 November 1976.
20 Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 59.

21 Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down*, p. 81.
22 C. Blase, 'A woman called Toothpaste: an interview with Lucy Whitman', *The F-Word*, 20 May 2011.
23 D. Widgery, 'What is racism?', *Temporary Hoarding* 1 (November 1976); J. Ash, N. Fountain and D. Renton (eds), *David Widgery. Against Miserabilism: Writings 1968–1992* (Glasgow: Vagabond Voices, 2017), pp. 123–126.
24 This excludes *Sniffin' Glue*, Mark Perry's punk fanzine which had begun in July 1976 and ended in August 1977 (i.e. around the third issue of *Temporary Hoarding*) with a circulation of 15,000 D. Baker, *Going to Sea in a Sieve* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012), p. 153.
25 One comparison of UK chart singles in 1976 with the songs on the first five albums by the Damned, the Clash, the Stranglers, the Sex Pistols and the Vibrators, suggests that chart songs were three times more likely to have romance or sex as their main theme, while punk songs were six times more likely to have political or social themes: R. Bestley, 'Hitsville UK: punk rock and graphic design in the faraway towns 1976–1984', PhD Thesis, University of the Arts, 2007, p. 100.
26 I. Birchall, 'Culture', *Young Guard*, September 1963, p. 6; I. Birchall, 'Pop music dialectics', *Young Guard*, April 1965, p. 5; I. Birchall, 'The rhymes they are a-changing', *International Socialism* 23 (1965), pp. 16–17; also D. Harker, *One for the Money: Politics and Popular Song* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), and D. Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong,' 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).
27 I. Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 103.
28 M. Worley, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture 1976–1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 143.
29 'Marxism and the mass media', *Jolt* 2 (1977). Max Farrar tells the story of attending a Beyond the Fragments Conference in Leeds in 1980, attended by 1,600 adults and their 130 children. Two benefit concerts were put on that evening, one by RAR-supporting punk band the Au Pairs, the other with Leon Rosselson. The children decamped to the former, the chose the latter, preferring a 'quiet communion with . . . an era that was disappearing before our eyes': M. Farrar, 'The libertarian movements of the 1970s: what can we learn?', *Edinburgh Review* 82 (winter 1989), pp. 58–74, 67.
30 E. Meadows, 'Pistol-whipped', *National Review*, 11 November 1979.
31 'I wasn't right-wing wing,' he says now. 'I was just an ignorant, green kid': Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down*, p. 376.
32 Roger Sabin criticises Dave Widgery for promoting the 'myth that punk was somehow anti-racist': R. Sabin, 'I won't let that dago go by: rethinking punk and racism', in R. Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 199–291, 200. It would be more accurate to say that Widgery and RAR saw punk as a *potential* ally in the struggle against fascism and a potential adversary, a point they did not hesitate to make in (for example) criticising even punk royalty such as the Sex Pistols or Adam and the Ants at the same time as trying to work with them.
33 G. Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 109.
34 In 1977, Whitman (writing as Lucy Toothpaste) had interviewed the Slits, Poly Styrene, Buzzcocks and the Fall for her fanzine, *JOLT.* By 1979, she had been part of the RAR collective for over a year, writing pieces such as 'No more normals' about what later generations would call heterosexism.
35 *Temporary Hoarding* 6 (summer 1978).
36 The same article included photographs of a RAR/Ants gig on 17 June 1978.
37 C. Coon, 'Rebels against the system', *Melody Maker*, 7 August 1976.
38 *Sideburns*, December 1976. The writers' DIY equivalent was a piece in the established music press: J. Savage, 'Fanzines: every home should print one', *Sounds*, 10 September 1976.
39 Steve Jones writes of this concert, 'Looking down from the stage, you wouldn't have known Morrissey and everyone else was there. Apart from anything else it wasn't that big

a crowd and they just looked like a standard bunch of Northern cunts with moustaches and kipper ties from where I was standing': S. Jones, *Lonely Boy: Tales from a Sex Pistol* (London: Windmill Books, 2016), p. 165.

40 V. Albertine, *Clothes, Music, Boys* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), p. 85.
41 Johnny Rotten interview with Dave Widgery, *Temporary Hoarding* 2 (June 1977); the Front respond to the interview with '"I despise NF" (we're shattered)', *NF News* 10 (August 1977).
42 M. Steel, *Reasons to be Cheerful* (London: Scribner, 2001), pp. 12–13.
43 J. Cope, *Head-On* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), pp. 28–30.
44 J. Savage, *England's Dreaming* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 482.
45 Worley, *No Future*, p. 29.
46 *New Musical Express*, 25 February 1978, 11 March 1978, 8 April 1978; *Sounds*, 25 March 1978.
47 D. Hebdidge, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 117.
48 J. Savage, 'What did you do on the Jubilee?', *New Musical Express*, 18 June 1977.
49 C. Coon, *1988: The New Wave Punk Rock Explosion* (London: Orbach and Chambers, 1977), p. 126; D. Haslam, *Young Hearts Run Free: The Real Story of the 1970s* (London: Harper, 2007), p. 229.
50 Jones, *Lonely Boy*, p. 196.
51 *Daily Mirror*, 20 December 1977, p. 1; Bestley, 'Hitsville UK', p. 17.
52 G. Marshall, *Spirit of '69: A Skinhead Bible* (Dunoon: S. T. Publishing, 1994), p. 71.
53 S. Wells, *Anarchy in the UK: The Story Behind the Anthems of Punk* (London: Carlton, 2004), p. 74.
54 Albertine, *Clothes, Music, Boys*, p. 77.
55 Indeed not just punk bands were taking up this look. In his memoir, the socialist miner David Douglass recalls being at a gig at Strathclyde in spring 1978 and beginning to reason with Motörhead's Lemmy, dressed in swastikas and Iron Crosses. 'Do I look like a Nazi?' Lemmy asked and such was his tone of voice that Douglass decided not to pursue the issue: D. J. Douglass, *The Wheel's Still in Spin* (Hastings: Read 'n' Noir, 2009), p. 395.
56 Jones, *Lonely Boy*, p. 221.
57 Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down*, p. 25; 'Fascism', *JOLT* 1 (January 1977); also 'Off your rocker', *JOLT* 3 (August 1977).
58 H. B. Poulsen, *'77: The Year of Punk and New Wave* (London: South Bank House, 2005), p. 28.
59 Jones, *Lonely Boy*, p. 221.
60 J. Savage, *The England's Dreaming Tapes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 340; also see Siouxsie's interview with Jill Nichols and Lucy Toothpaste in *Spare Rib*, July 1979.
61 'Skins', *Temporary Hoarding* 6.
62 Hebdidge, *Subculture*, pp. 56, 58, original emphasis; J. Clarke, 'The Skinheads and the magical recover of community', in S. Hall and T. Jefferson (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (London: Routledge, 1993 edn), pp. 80–83.
63 R. Forbes and E. Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement: UK and USA, 1979–1993* (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House, 2015), pp. 34, 40, 54.
64 Marshall, *Spirit of '69*, p. 73.
65 Huddle and Saunders, *Reminiscences*, p. 199.
66 Huddle and Saunders, *Reminiscences*, p. 83.
67 G. Bushell, *Sounds of Glory: Volume Two, The Punk and Ska Years* (London: New Haven Publishing, 2016), p. 185.
68 Rock Against Racism, 'Dub Conference', pp. 7–11.
69 Richard Lees, *Propaganda: Hull Rock Against Racism Posters 1979–1982* (Hull: Rock Against Racism, 2007).
70 Bushell, *Sounds of Glory*, p. 185.
71 Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down*, pp. 33, 34.
72 I. Birchall, *Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time* (London: Bookmarks, 2011), p. 369.
73 Huddle and Saunders, *Reminiscences*, p. 111.

5

LEWISHAM

From spring 1977, the clashes between the National Front and its opponents grew more frequent. In Doncaster, Front supporters clashed with anti-fascists outside the Vine public house.[1] On 23 April, a 1,200-strong Front march through Wood Green in North London was opposed by some 3,000 anti-racists, including supporters of the Labour Party, the IWA, trade unions, members of RAR and the Socialist Workers Party. While Communists and churchmen addressed a rally at one end of Duckett's Common,[2] younger anti-fascists broke away and subjected the NF column to a barrage of flares, eggs and rotten fruit. Some eighty-one people were arrested, all bar seven of them anti-fascists. Richard Atkinson recalls an angry, confident counter-demonstration: 'Someone had the wit to set off a smoke bomb. There were Turkish, Greek and black kids fighting against the Nazis.' Anna Sullivan also found herself at Wood Green and recalls watching the young throw anything they could at the Front: 'All the shops lost one shoe in every pair.' Jerry Fitzpatrick was one of the organisers of the breakaway: 'I'd come from an Irish background. I had been at Derry in 1969. I had seen the resistance on the Bogside; that was a factor. We wanted to organise in the same way.' The smoke bombs that Atkinson recalls were in fact marine flares:

> I bought them from a boatyard. I thought they would make an effective public spectacle. We sought a non-violent context. But we were willing to sharpen the demonstration, to give a sense of colour and cover as people confronted the Nazis.

Dave Morris was a supporter of the Haringey and Islington Claimants Union, a libertarian group which emphasised the struggle of benefits claimants against the state. He saw the anti-fascists confront the NF but remembers that the Front were able

to regroup and continue on their way. He also saw the police removing protesters from the pavements at the side of the Front march:

> Somehow, I got through, seemingly the only one who did at that time. For half an hour I walked alone alongside the fascist demonstration as it completely dominated the streets, protected by police who cleared away most of the public in general. It was eerie . . . After getting increasingly funny looks from cops and marchers despite my innocent whistling and humming and pretending to admire the cracks in the paving stones, I sloped off.

Another anti-fascist protester, David Bennie, was even closer to the National Front. His diary provides a vivid record of the day's events:

> We walked to Turnpike Lane where the counter-demonstration was assembling in the presence of vast numbers of police . . . We watched the Front march form up a hundred yards away, with plenty of verbal exchange between the two sides. It seemed incredible to me that the police could allow such an obviously explosive confrontation to occur . . . A little way along Wood Green High Road the march was attacked. Red smoke bombs filled the air and a battle was soon under way. Everything that could be thrown was thrown at the fascists in an attempt to stop the march. Police horses appeared on the pavement and if shoppers got in their way that was hard luck.

The National Front was holding a rally in a local school:

> I suggested that we try and go inside. At this point Steve said we were crazy and left. There was some dispute at the door about whether to admit us but finally we got in and I heard a couple of minutes of the meeting. 'If they're black, send them back.' The atmosphere was one of rabid anti-intellectualism, clearly thought was a sign of weakness. Then somebody said, 'they're commies', and we were recognised as anti-fascists, which I thought was obvious anyway. The mood was ugly so we made to leave but they weren't able to restrain themselves, we were jostled and pushed out. Robin, a yard behind me, received a number of blows and kicks until blood was running from his nose. Some of this happened outside but the police stood around nearby, ignoring it.

The experience of seeing the Front at close hand convinced Bennie that the Front were a serious antagonist: 'Any illusions I may have had about non-violent means of opposing them were destroyed in that school.'[3]

Ted Parker took part in the Wood Green protest: 'What I remember . . . is how close we came. The Front were brought in by the police, with a lot of protection, a lot of secrecy. We didn't really think we could stop them. But one day, we would.'

Jerry Fitzpatrick was also thinking towards the future:

> I drew two lessons. First, we needed logistics, more supporters in the set area, more street planning and a better sense of what the police tactics would be. Second, there had to be an intense effort towards organising among the local community.

In the aftermath of Wood Green, campaigners from a range of left-wing groups made a serious attempt at establishing a respected, national, anti-fascist network. In 1977, Danny Reilly was a former member of IS now working at the Institute of Race Relations near Kings Cross. His plan was to launch a national anti-fascist campaign, based on the solidarity that had been seen at Wood Green: 'People came from all different backgrounds and for a time there was good co-operation.' In May 1977, some twenty-three anti-fascist committees in London came together to form an All London Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Co-ordinating Committee (ALARAFCC), which adopted *CARF*, the paper of the Kingston Campaign against Racism and Fascism, as its bi-monthly journal.[4] A joint meeting was organised and all factions on the left invited:

> We tried to organise a big conference at Middlesex Poly. Loads of people came but somehow it didn't gel. Perhaps we were too liberal. We allowed resolutions from all over. There were so many motions, compositing, it felt like student politics. There were lots of different elements represented, old Communist Party, trades council types, women's groups and the gay movement, which was very hostile to the left . . . the movement was too disparate.

Even with decades of hindsight, Reilly is unsure what went wrong. 'We were local groups with scant resources . . . We were trying to organise from the bottom up.'

Two weeks after the protests at Wood Green, the National Front attempted to hold an election meeting at Shoreditch School in east London. Five hundred people turned out to prevent them.[5] In that spring's GLC elections, the Front won over 100,000 votes, averaging over 15 per cent of the vote in Hackney and Tower Hamlets. The mood of popular racism, going back to the previous year's events and the press campaign against the threatened arrivals from Malawi, was not yet exhausted.

The police against black youth

The roots of the protest in Lewisham go back to a police campaign against street robberies. In May 1977, eighteen people were arrested and charged with conspiracy to steal purses. Every suspect was black. Paul Foot described their arrests:

> 5.30 Monday Morning. Six policemen break down the door of 21 Childeric Road in Deptford, South East London, with an axe. Another six smash down

> the back door. They pour inside, overturning furniture, ripping open drawers and turning people out of their beds. Christopher Foster, aged 16, is frog-marched into the road in his underclothes . . . He and four other young people in the house are rushed to Penge police station. These include Cathy Cullis, a young white girl. She is stripped to her underwear in a cell. Two policemen come and joke about the 'disease' she has caught living with black people.[6]

Tony Bogues and Kim Gordon of the SWP black members' group Flame[7] met with David Foster, the father of Christopher Foster. According to Bogues:

> David [Foster] was an ordinary, nice fellow who had believed in the early stages of his life the myths about British justice but on arriving in Britain he was immediately aware of the question of race . . . We sat down and talked with him for days. His house became the community house. There were large meetings, quiet meetings. The question of self-defence from the fascists and the police came up in discussion with the youth. We spent a lot of time, a lot of time, persuading people to work with us.

David Foster's home can be seen in Syd Shelton's photographs of the Rock Against Racism campaign. The wallpapers are lurid oranges and browns, reminiscent of Islamic tiles. David Foster is photographed beside his wife and son. Foster smokes at home, he wears a tie and his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows. One of Foster's sons, perhaps Christopher, is at the centre of the image, polite and respectful in the company of a guest, not even daring to make eye contact with Shelton.[8]

Later, Prince Charles was visiting the Moonshot Youth Club when Kim Gordon approached him and spoke about the ill-treatment of the Lewisham defendants. The prince suggested a meeting between the police and the defence committee.[9] Gordon met with a senior officer but the police refused to drop the charges.

Tony Bogues recalls with pride the work done by black revolutionaries in building up a mass movement in support of the detainees:

> There was a way in which you talked with working-class people. You started from what they thought. It was a different style from the British left. We didn't leaflet people. We asked what they thought . . . I made initial contacts, with the people in Flame and also with family, friends, the sorts of people you drink with in the bar . . . The International Marxist Group had a guy called Fitzroy, from Nigeria. There was the Black Marxist Collective in Croydon. It was a different kind of politics, based on the immigrant cultures.

News of the campaign spread beyond the borough and in June 1977, the Front announced plans for an anti-mugging[10] march through Lewisham.

Leila Hassan was a member of the Race Today Collective. Amongst political clubs, youth networks and even sports teams, she recalls, plans were being made to protect south London from the National Front:

> In those days there wasn't social media, there was a lot of phone calls. It was all word of mouth. You just got to hear about things. And so we knew, the fascists were coming. In terms of how it was mobilised, it was word of mouth. It just spread. It was very interconnected, the black community of the time. We thought we were on the move.

'Lewisham was the climax', Tony Bogues recalls, 'of a series of activities in the black underground.' It drew in energy, he suggests, from a dozen different campaigns taking place across the whole of London. The highest-profile of these activities was Grunwick, a photo-processing laboratory in north west London, where picket line clashes were reported on the news throughout the summer of 1977. The strike had begun a year earlier when the employer George Ward dismissed one of his employees, Devshia Budhia, for slow working and others including Jayaben Desai walked out in his support. The workforce was almost entirely Asian and largely female.

Grunwick also saw significant solidarity action by white trade unionists. Over months of picketing, the numbers protesting slowly grew and strikers approached the union APEX for support. Workers in the factory were expected to work 50 hours a week for wages of just 70 pence per hour. By June 1977, the dispute had become a fixture in the national news. On 15 June, 1,500 people joined a mass picket in support of the striking workers. Meanwhile George Ward was supported by the National Association for Freedom, a free-market organisation on the Tory right. On 9 July, NAFF turned out 250 volunteers and 150 vehicles to ferry strike-breakers across the picket line. Two days later, on 11 July, the National Union of Miners called for a day of action in support of the Grunwick strikers. Several hundred miners travelled from Barnsley bringing their brass bands and banners. A young left-wing miner from Yorkshire, David Douglass, was watching as Arthur Scargill arrived, 'Arms outstretched at the head of the throng . . . looking like Jesus at the last supper.' There were clashes with the police and Scargill was arrested. But the miners' leader was not yet as well-known to the state as he was among the workers and one of the policeman told him, 'We've got him . . . that leader of yours Arthur Scargill.' 'You'd better take a firm hold of him,' Scargill is said to have answered. 'He's a slippery character.'[11]

The sky darkened

The Front was following the same approach as it had in 1972 at Mansfield Hosiery and in 1974 at Imperial Typewriters. The NF saw a group of black activists campaigning in response to a grievance and assumed that there would be a backlash against them. Yet one difference between its protest at Lewisham and these earlier campaigns was that in 1972 and 1974 the Front had been able to draw on a well of local support. At Mansfield Hosiery and at Imperial Typewriters, black workers were campaigning for a pay rise and equality with whites. The Front was able to present itself as the advocate of white workers who benefited from the status quo.

At Lewisham, the police did not need the Front to advocate on their behalf. Nor was there are any other local campaign with which the Front could ally. There was no right-wing equivalent of the family of David Foster. The Front was bringing its members to Lewisham for an all-London mobilisation. They felt like strangers coming into Lewisham from outside.

The left, by contrast, had well-rooted local activists and a cause around which to mobilise. Ted Parker was the organiser of a local branch of the SWP. He had been brought up in Folkestone, in a patriotic 'services' family. He had joined the Royal Air Force at age 16, before deciding that he sided with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Parker was court-martialled, given an eight-month sentence and expelled from the RAF. He later ended up at the London School of Economics during the heady years of 1966–1969. In 1967, he toured South Africa, delivering clandestine leaflets for the banned African National Congress.

Anti-fascists in Lewisham had to decide whether or not to call for a ban on the NF march. Under the Public Order Act 1936, such powers were available to the Home Secretary and the *Morning Star* called on Labour's Mervyn Rees to use them. Metropolitan Police Commissioner David McNee let it be known that he would support a ban but only if it was to last for three months, and prohibit all political demonstrations, not just those of the far right.[12]

Parker attended meetings with the council which discussed whether these powers should be used. He was interviewed in the Lewisham *Mercury*. He spoke against a general ban and called on local people to protect their area from the Front: 'I tried to draw parallels with the Battle of Cable Street in the 1930s. Mosley had been anti-Semitic and violent. In Germany, the fascists were allowed to march. But in Britain, at Cable Street, they had been stopped.' He was asked about the police. 'I said I had a friend in the police who hated the Front as much as I did. But if the Front march and the police protect them, we're ready to fight if that's what it takes.'

Another person working on the anti-NF protest was Jerry Fitzpatrick:

> A group of us set up headquarters in a building on Clifton Rise. We occupied a house and used it as an organising centre. Norma, a local activist, was central to this organisation and Ted Parker. We created an atmosphere among black youth. People came in to collect leaflets and posters. You got a sense of people organising things themselves.

Lewisham was and is a mixed working-class area, with a high proportion of African and Caribbean families as well as many people from an Irish background. Fitzpatrick recalls the part the latter played in the run-up to Lewisham: 'There was an Irish hall next to our centre. We were allowed into there and into the Irish pubs and dances, to raise money, to speak about the National Front as the latest incarnation of British imperialism.'

Through summer 1977, Parker recalls, the left and the right repeatedly clashed, with the Front trying to close down left-wing paper sales:

> We had been selling *Socialist Worker* in Lewisham town centre. The Front would storm in and break us up. We had to rally as many people as we could to protect us. People used to come down from east London to help us out. There was one estate in Catford, where most of the Front lived. It became notorious for racist attacks. They also attacked a Sikh temple in Woolwich.

On 18 June, members of the Front attacked a *Socialist Worker* sale in Lewisham. John Sturrock's photographs of the day, taken from behind the attacked socialists, show a man in his twenties crouched, ready to defend himself. The Front attackers have long hair and are dressed in denims and striped jackets.[13]

The same day, the central committee of the SWP wrote to their counterparts in the Communist Party suggesting that there should be 'joint meetings of the committees of our two parties responsible for anti-racialist activities, with a view to launching a joint campaign within the Labour movement to drive the fascists off the streets'.[14] Events on the picket lines at Grunwick may have influenced the first suggested area of joint activity; the build-up to Lewisham shaped the second.

Although members of the Communist Party had distinguished IS from the other 'ultra-left sects', and previously recognised at least the possibility of joint industrial campaigns,[15] from the perspective of most Communists there was little to be gained from a joint anti-fascist initiative. The Communists were by far the larger party; if they were going to make an alliance with anyone, it would be with the Labour left. Moreover, the CP and the SWP had different ideas for how best to confront the fascists. From the CP's perspective, the crucial task was to win over people in the middle ground so as to create the largest possible alliance against the right. Numbers alone would be the deciding factor; the key was to turn out the most people possible. Ever since events at Red Lion Square, if not before, the CP had been warning against those who sought to confront the NF, tactics the Communists regarded as 'adventurist' and likely to place 'the whole demonstration in jeopardy'.[16] Nothing that had happened in the intervening three years had moved the CP from this line.

The CP's preferred approach was expressed in the plans put forward by the All-Lewisham Campaign Against Racialism and Fascism (ALCARAF). Faced with the prospect of the NF march on 13 August, ALCARAF proposed a large demonstration before and at some distance from the Front. The *Morning Star* ridiculed the SWP for pursuing what it described as 'definitive game of Cowboys and Indians'.[17]

In that spirit, Bert Ramelson, the CPGB's national industrial organiser, replied to the SWP, agreeing in principle that united action was needed but saying that it was the view of his party that the SWP's 'activity and propaganda is divisive and disruptive, making more difficult the development of united struggle'.[18]

On 2 July, members of the National Front attacked a demonstration in support of the Lewisham arrestees. One left-wing teacher was kicked unconscious. Although this time it was the left that was being attacked, the police still managed to arrest twenty-three anti-fascists.[19] In *Socialist Worker*, Dave Peers warned his comrades to expect further attacks from the Front:

> The attacks on the demonstration by the Nazis – and in turn by the police – are the culmination of a month of growing fascist and police harassment in the area. We have received well-founded reports that this represents a change of tactics by the Nazis . . . We have been informed that their South London branches have been given a free hand to attack left-wing demonstrations. This is a danger that no anti-fascist – SWP member or not – can ignore.[20]

Despite the divisions on the left, by late July, Jerry Fitzpatrick recalls, the mood in the area was hostile to the Front and supportive of confrontation:

> There was one incident – it was a small, trivial thing, really. About three weeks before the demonstration, the police were chasing a black youth and he ran into our building. They grabbed him and me too, accusing me of providing him with a false alibi. In court, we provided him with a solicitor. He didn't get off but it was a light sentence. In the days after, I had a really strong sense that the barriers had come down. The word went round that we would help people against the aggressive police.

Steve Jeffreys was another anti-fascist planning for Lewisham:

> I've never been on a demonstration that was so well organised. We knew that coaches were coming from all over the country. We knew from Lewisham that there would be a kind of local uprising. We discussed hiring a lorry and using that to block the road but we thought that would put the organisational details in front of the politics. We knew we had the numbers.

The National Front, meanwhile, was well aware of the left's plans but remained defiant about its capacity to turn out greater numbers than its opponents. At a final press conference before the demonstration, the Front's national organiser Martin Webster told journalists, 'We intend to destroy race relations here.' Front branches across London were instructed to send their members to Lewisham for what was promised to be the Front's 'biggest ever . . . mass mobilisation'.[21]

Ted Parker's duties included purchasing the rotten fruit to throw at the National Front: 'We bought marine flares to signal where people were needed – we'd learned that from Wood Green. I went to the market and brought absolutely barrel-loads of rotten fruit. We gave that to people in carrier bags.' By the week of the demonstration, Parker's greatest fear was that the National Front would somehow pre-empt the demonstrators, perhaps by attacking them the night before. He was not the only one to consider that possibility. According to Jerry Fitzpatrick, 'The day before the march, the police raided the centre. They were looking for megaphones, banners, the things we would need for the demonstration. But they found just two walkie-talkies. We were expecting raids and had already cleared out.'

Andy Strouthous spent the Friday evening touring around Lewisham with Kim Gordon and Tony Bogues from Flame:

> We met people on the estates, black kids, gangs and their leader . . . We explained that tomorrow we'd be organising the biggest march that any of them had seen, that we'd take on the National Front and also the police. Some people didn't know what to make of us – they were calling us this and that. But we talked to a lot of people. And the day after, you got a real sense. There was a large group of black people. Hundreds, thousands even. They were waiting.

If some were waiting in a state of eager anticipation, others were less enthusiastic. Maeve Landman was a young black teacher and exile from South Africa. She worked at a school in south London. In the run-up to the events at Lewisham, she recalls sticking up posters for the demonstration. She was convinced she would be arrested: 'I washed my child's teddy bear. I took him to my mother's. I didn't want my mother to say anything, if she had to look after him for several days.'

The day began at 11 a.m. with a march called by the Communist Party, Catholic organisations, councillors and members of ALCARAF. Lewisham's Mayor Godsif and Mervyn Stockwood, the Bishop of Southwark, led the protest. The Tories, Labour and the Liberals all brought delegations. 'This is the voice of the Lewisham people,' Mayor Godsif told the crowd. 'We come here to show what the ordinary, decent reasonable citizens of Lewisham think of their borough being turned into a battled ground by fascists and the National Front.' The 4,000 people who took part expressed their opposition to the Front after which many left the area, but not all of them.

According to the *Sunday Times*:

> The [marchers] wanted to demonstrate peacefully against the National Front by marching from Ladywell Fields along Lewisham High Street and Lewisham Way to Railway Grove. Although this was close to where the Front was due to assemble, Alcaraf argued that its march would be over at least ninety minutes before the Front assembled.[22]

The police, having previously accepted ALCARAF's proposed route, on 13 August changed their mind and ordered ALCARAF to disperse. The moderate anti-fascists, to their credit, refused to go. Numbers of people milled around the area, easing the task of the SWP and others calling for the left to reassemble at the NF's intended starting point of Clifton Rise.

Dave Widgery was gently dismissive of those who took part in the first demonstration:

> The official protest march, including the Catholics, the councillors and the Communists, made indignant speeches against fascism in Lewisham and

> carefully avoided going within two miles of the fascists who were assembling behind the British Rail station at New Cross where the atmosphere was less forgiving.[23]

Briefly joining the first demonstration, Ted Parker and Jerry Fitzpatrick distributed a leaflet calling upon the demonstrators to join a second protest, which would assemble at the Front's planned assembly point. In Fitzpatrick's words:

> We tried hard to persuade the other groups, the Communists and the church people, not to call a counter demonstration at the same time at a different venue but to organise theirs in such a way that if people then wanted to march with us, they could. In the event we succeeded because their demo finished in time for the bulk of them to join us at Clifton Rise.

Meanwhile other of Widgery's comrades were doing all they could to persuade the Communists and other moderate anti-fascists to remain in Lewisham.

A leaflet put out by the Communist Party expressed that group's hostility to any physical attack on the Front:

> Those who insist on the ritual enactment of vanguardist violence only damage the hard, patient work that has been put in over the years in the area by anti-racists and anti-fascists . . . We totally oppose the harassment and the provocative march planned by the SWP.[24]

Yet hundreds did go from the first march to the second. According to Parker:

> We knew one pivotal thing was to get as many people as possible from the first march up to Clifton Rise. We had lorries on the first march, telling people what the plan was, urging them to join us. The fascinating thing was that people wanted to march to Clifton Rise but they just wouldn't line up behind a Socialist Workers Party banner. You could see it. We had the numbers. Eventually, we found some members of some other group like the IMG with a banner for some united campaign against racism and fascism. People agree to group behind that. It taught me a lesson for later – many people would support a united campaign, they didn't all want just to line up behind the SWP.

Red Saunders was part of the crowd who joined both demonstrations:

> There were all these Christians and Communists, telling us to go home. Most people stayed. But we were all just milling about, when this old black lady, too old to march, came out on her balcony. She put out her speakers, as loud as they could, playing 'Get up, stand up'. That did it for me.

Angus MacKinnon was reporting for the *New Musical Express*. He arrived at Clifton Rise, the starting point of the second anti-Front assembly:

> I arrived at New Cross and couldn't get any further. It was about eleven o'clock and there were already a lot of people there – most were trade unionists. It said in the press the next day that there were three thousand but it must have been twice that number. They said it was the standard rent-a-mob. It wasn't.

Footage of the Front demonstration at its start shows a couple of hundred people waiting for reinforcements. Martin Webster can be heard thorough a megaphone, his voice rising with the anxiety of the situation:

> The only chant today is National Front, nothing else. We don't want any backchat with the coppers, we don't want any backchat with the Reds. We don't want anybody leaving the columns. We want you all to behave yourselves, take orders from your stewards, take orders from the police, behave yourself . . . No leaving the column for fights.

According to Parker, the anti-fascists had a clear plan:

> We would try to get as many people as possible to Clifton Rise, New Cross Station. We knew the police would try to keep the groups separated, on each side of the railway lines. We'd make some effort there, at the beginning but it was a feint really. If we couldn't stop the Front at Clifton Rise, we would let the Front go . . . along New Cross Road. Smaller groups would ambush them . . . Our largest number would turn round and march quickly along Lewisham Way. That's where we were going to make a real effort.

Einde O'Callaghan, a student at City University, was at the junction in New Cross. It was at the top of a hill and he could see the day's events clearly:

> There was a huge police cordon between us and the NF's meeting place. As the Front march set off, it had to come out on to the main road at the bottom of the hill. We had linked arms by this stage and were facing the police cordon that stood between us and the NF march. I was with the comrades from the university in about the seventh or eighth line. To be quite honest I didn't want to be in the first row as I knew what was supposed to happen.

The first step was simple. The fascist march was below the anti-fascist contingent. On hearing a signal, anti-fascists would charge down the hill.

The sign to attack was delivered by Jerry Fitzpatrick. He and the other stewards had decided not to confront the National Front honour guard, composed of the

hardened street fighters, marching at the very front of the NF contingent. Instead, their attack would be aimed at the middle of the fascist procession. O'Callaghan remembers Fitzpatrick standing on a box, by the traffic lights, waiting for the Front as they crossed the road at the bottom of the hill. As the NF approached, the SWP contingent could be heard chanting, 'The workers united will never be defeated.' Fitzpatrick set off a flare; the signal to advance.

O'Callaghan was among those who followed:

> We charged down the hill against the police cordon. The rows of demonstrators in front of me broke under the strain of the pushing but by the time our line came to the front, the police cordon had weakened sufficiently and we broke through into the middle of the march. I can remember that we grabbed an NF banner and in a tug of war we managed to get it off them, all the while maintaining linked arms – how we did it I don't know. Eventually the police managed to push us back but I remember that there was a hail of bricks from some convenient building sites alongside the route of the march and assorted other stuff, including at least one dustbin.

Dave Widgery was also there:

> In New Cross Road, just down from Goldsmiths' College, a crowd of 5,000 anti-NFers had assembled by midday. People gently milled; here surging forward under banners that sprang and swooped like kites, there breaking out into feminist war whoops, elsewhere shouting recognition in noisy South London patois . . . At the front, a ram-packed contingent of South London Afro-Caribbeans cordially but expertly blocked off the police's first attempts – uphill and on foot – to open a way for the NF . . .
>
> An officer with a megaphone read an order to disperse. No one did; seconds later the police cavalry cantered into sight and sheered through the front row of protesters.

So, continues Widgery, the day might have ended:

> Except that people refused to melt away from the police horses and jeer ineffectually from the side-lines. A horse went over, then another and the Front were led forward so fast that they were quickly struggling. Then suddenly the sky darkened (as they say in Latin poetry), only this time with clods, rocks, lumps of wood, planks and bricks . . . The Front found it most difficult to dodge this cannonade while upholding the dignity appropriate to a master race inspecting soon-to-be-deported underlings. The NF march was broken in two, their banners seized and burnt.[25]

Syd Shelton photographed middle-aged Front supporters reeling from this first attack. They held their wrists over their faces, afraid of appearing in the next day's

papers. One man buried his face in handkerchief, his comb-over having collapsed. A female companion was led demoralised from the fray.[26]

Another of Shelton's photograph shows three black Lewisham youngsters, in tight jeans and denim jackets, cheering as they clutched a piece of braid fabric which had been ripped from the banner of the Front's Honour Guard.[27]

'Up on a traffic bollard', Widgery continued, 'a Trinidadian giant with a hand megaphone [the black writer and campaigner Darcus Howe] was thoughtfully advising the crowd, rather as a cricket captain might place his field.'[28] It was not a traffic bollard but the roof of a toilet bloc, which Howe in jeans and a polo shirt was occupying together with around a dozen other protesters.

The Front were just about able to reassemble and march east along New Cross Road in the direction of Deptford. Crowds threw fruit as the NF passed. Smaller groups attacked them from the side streets; while the remaining forces of the NF's honour guard, short men with moustaches dressed in combat gear, did their best to kick and punch their assailants away. The anti-fascists' chants gave way to an incoherent roar, punctured with shouts of 'bastards' directed at the police.

The majority of anti-fascists meanwhile were heading east along Lewisham Way. Their direction was similar to the National Front, albeit along a shorter route and without the fighting that slowed down the NF march. By 2.30 p.m., most anti-fascists had arrived at central Lewisham, about the midway point in the NF's planned route. They were able to hold the area around the Clock Tower.

According to Charli Langford, a member of the IMG:

> We were the first banner and marching with no police 'escort' at all but by the time we'd done half a mile there was a group of black youth, generally in the 14 to 20 age range, demoing ahead of us and this group grew until it was maybe 400-strong as we went along. Big contrast between the all-black youth ahead of us and the 95 per cent plus white contingents from the original demo. There were people hanging out of windows and waving and cheering.

At around 2.30 p.m., the bruised remnants of the National Front march reached Lewisham train station. The marchers could then look south, where the whole of Lewisham was occupied by the largest group of anti-NF protesters, outnumbering the police and the Front several times over. Not daring to continue along their planned route, the Front headed north towards Blackheath, where they stopped in a deserted car park and Chairman John Tyndall gave a short, downbeat speech.

> We regret the inconvenience that has been caused to many people in the Borough this afternoon. We wanted to have a peaceful and orderly march in a part of our capital city . . . The fact that there has not been peace and order this afternoon, the fact that people have had to board up their windows and shut themselves in their homes, the fact that businessmen have had to close down their shops and lose money, these are all things we enormously regret . . .

> The police did a splendid job. They could have done an even better job had they been allowed to go in with tear gas, with rubber bullets . . . When we get in, the police are not going to go unarmed into these affrays.[29]

By 3 p.m., the Front had been removed. Yet the euphoria that greeted the news of the Front's defeat was diminished as people realised that the police were still determined to clear the anti-fascists from the streets. Ted Parker was now at Lewisham clock tower and recalls 'A tide of people blocking the road'.

O'Callaghan was also at the clock tower:

> The police attempted to clear this area several times but without success. Then they brought out the horses. This was the first time I'd ever encountered police horses. It's quite a frightening experience but together with some other comrades we got the people to link arms facing the police lines . . . At that time the pavements along Lewisham High Street were being newly paved with conveniently-sized bricks. These were used to pelt the police. It was quite terrifying at first. We were occupying the street facing a line of police. Behind us were large numbers of young blacks who were lobbing half-bricks over our heads into the middle of the police – miraculously none of us seemed to be hit. The police would charge us, our line would part and the young blacks would simply melt away into the side streets. Then the whole thing was repeated facing in the other direction. At some stage the police brought out the riot shields, the first time they had been used on the 'mainland'.

Now that the fascists had left, the conflict that remained was between anti-fascists and the police. According to Langford:

> I saw the riot shields in use outside the Odeon cinema and later further south towards Ladywell there was a police motorbike abandoned, covered with green paint and on fire. Lots of dented and scratched police transits with big holes in their windows were zooming round but there was no other traffic whatsoever.

Dave Widgery describes the mood after the day had ended:

> We were frightened and we were brave and proud and ashamed at the same time. As the day became more brutal and frightening and the police, furious at their failure, turned to take revenge on the counter demonstrators, there was one big flash of recognition on the faces in the groups: between dread and socialist, between lesbian separatist and black parent, between *NME* speedfreak and ASTMS branch secretary. We were together.[30]

Faith Foster, the mother of Christopher, was also upbeat:

> The National Front couldn't march through Lewisham. We wouldn't let them. We stuck to our word, 'They shall not pass.' I caught the bus into Brockley with my friend to see the end of the march, as I couldn't go all the way; my daughter had only just come out of hospital after having her appendix out and couldn't be left for long. We walked down Ladywell Road and what I saw, my heart was laughing inside. I had not been happy for so long.[31]

The evening news featured a frightened old woman sitting with her feet on the pavement, clearly dazed and incapable of standing. The decontextualised image failed to name her as an NF supporter, Esther Sizer, a veteran of previous protests who had marched, by her own account, 'expecting trouble'.[32] 'That night', wrote the *Sunday Telegraph*'s Sally Beauman, 'on television; the NF appear[ed] model citizens and the left wing opposition, throwing bricks at police, look[ed] terrifying.'[33]

Newspapers ran with the hundreds arrested and the fifty policemen injured, portraying the conflict as a senseless battle between two parallel sets of extremists. The front page of the *Sunday Times* reported Metropolitan Police Commissioner David McNee condemning the 'determined extreme element' of the left for preventing a 'lawful march' from taking place.[34] The *Sunday People* featured the headline, 'Bobbies pay the price of freedom'. A leader in *The Times* blamed the SWP, 'whose members and adherents, some of them armed with vicious weapons, came prepared to fight. That their belligerent intent so soon transferred itself from their avowed enemy, the Front, to the police is an appalling indictment of their true philosophy.' The *Daily Mail* used a front-page picture of a policeman holding a studded club and a knife, weapons supposedly found at Lewisham and beside him was the headline, 'After the Battle of Lewisham, a question of vital importance, now who will defend him?' The *Daily Express* went further: 'We have no time or sympathy for the Front . . . All the same, the Front does not go in for violent attacks on the police or on authority.' Hugo Young told the *Sunday Times* that the SWP was 'a forerunner of the forces of darkness'. Tory leader Margaret Thatcher informed the press that 'Your Communism is the left foot of Socialism and your Fascism the right foot of it.'[35]

Several Labour Party voices agreed. The *Daily Mirror* claimed that the SWP was 'as bad as the National Front', while Michael Foot, a left-winger since the 1930s, insisted that 'you don't stop the Nazis by throwing bottles or bashing the police. The most ineffective way of fighting the fascists is to behave like them.' A spokesman for Prime Minister Jim Callaghan let the press know that he was considering a prohibition on left-wing marches.[36] Syd Bidwell, the Ealing Labour MP and a former member of IS/SWP's distant predecessor the Socialist Review Group, announced that he had time neither for the Front nor 'for those crackpot adventurers who have yet to take their part in responsibility in the real Labour movement. We cannot counter them by a strategy of trying to out-thug the thugs of the National Front.'[37]

Despite these criticisms, anti-fascists remained upbeat. 'A lot came out of the events at Lewisham,' writes Widgery:

> The black community, who had successfully defended their patch, had had a glimpse of a white anti-racist feeling which was much bigger and more militant than the liberal community-relations tea parties might suggest. A lot of ordinary people thought it was a Good Thing that the little Hitlers had taken a bit of a stick. Every little racialist was made smaller.[38]

According to the paper *CARF*, such was the scale of the setback that 'if I was a National Front member I'd be hitting the bottle by now'.[39]

'Two-thirds of the people who marched with the NF at Lewisham', claims Red Saunders, 'never marched again. Lewisham pulled back the Union Jack to show the swastika underneath. If you're not ready for confrontation, you never come again.'

Among the Front, the mood was in fact polarised by age. The party's newest supporters remained bullish. Joe Pearce was 16 years old. A recent recruit to the Front, his recollection of Lewisham was of exhilaration in the aftermath of the fighting. As Pearce saw it, he had been tested but was not afraid. A month later, Pearce would bring out the first edition of an NF youth paper, *Bulldog*. Yet even in Pearce's upbeat memories, there is a passing acknowledgement of the Front's future difficulties. He notes that prior to Lewisham, the Front had been capable of pulling together crowds of several thousand supporters. The crowd at Lewisham was younger. 'In the future,' he writes, 'the older, respectable NF supporters . . . would stay away.'[40]

John Bean was typical of the older generation; he was already withdrawing from the National Front after twenty-five years of political activity on the far right. The Front's march through Lewisham, he believed, was a grotesque piece of political stupidity. The NF 'had marched through an immigrant area deliberately to stir up trouble'. It was obvious to him that the Front would take the blame.[41]

Martin Webster's justification of Lewisham, published in *Spearhead*, appears to have had these criticisms in mind. Some three-quarters of Webster's article was given over not to the events at Lewisham or his plans for what would follow but a retrospective justification for calling the march. 'The Activists', he wrote, [i.e. the members of the Front who planned the event] 'felt that as, over years, the Police had always allowed SWP/IS members, International Marxists and Reds of various other stripes to "militantly demonstrate" against [the Front's] marches . . . the Police would give equal counter-demonstration rights to the National Front.'[42]

In a letter to Prime Minister James Callaghan, John Tyndall warned against any ban on future Front demonstrations. 'The violence at Lewisham', Tyndall insisted, 'was organised, not by the National Front itself but by its extreme opponents.' He and his party were the victims, he insisted:

> The question has been asked if we were not intending to 'provoke' why did we march through an area where there is not a large immigrant population? The simple answer is that it is in the major urban areas of this country where

> most of our active support lies and there is scarcely any major urban area left where there is not a large immigrant population.

Writing as if he genuinely believed he had the ear of his intended audience in Downing Street, Tyndall went on to list what he suggested were a series of alternatives to an anti-Front ban. It would be far better, Tyndall argued, if the Labour government instead proscribed the SWP who were responsible for events at Lewisham. After that, the government should ban the Notting Hill Carnival.[43]

In the aftermath of Lewisham, both the left and the right faced the problem of intense, hostile, press scrutiny. The tactics of anti-fascists were to change dramatically. The Front, by contrast, attempted to carry on without change.

Notes

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2 M. Walker, 'Left buries its differences to oppose National Front', *Guardian*, 22 April 1977.
3 D. Renton, K. Flett and I. Birchall, *The Battle of Wood Green* (London: Haringey Trades Council, 2002), pp. 15–17.
4 *CARF* 1 (May 1977), p. 4.
5 'Forward to a command council', reproduced in *Race Today*, July–August 1978.
6 P. Foot, 'Police on racist rampage', *Socialist Worker*, 11 June 1977.
7 T. Bogues, K. Gordon and C. L. R. James, *Black Nationalism and Socialism* (London: SWP, 1979).
8 S. Shelton, *Rock Against Racism* (London: Autograph, 2015), pp. 41–42.
9 'A mugging – but the police look the other way', *Socialist Worker*, 25 June 1977.
10 This was not the first occasion on which the Front had called a demonstration around that issue. An October 1975 anti-mugging demonstration through the East End is recorded in S. Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 edn), p. 327.
11 Douglass, *The Wheel's Still in Spin*, p. 406.
12 E. Smith, *British Communism and the Politics of Race* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), p. 185; *Morning Star*, 10 August 1977.
13 Bishopsgate Institute archive, LHM/93.
14 'An appeal for united left action', *Socialist Worker*, 18 June 1977.
15 G. Roberts, 'The strategy of rank and filism', *Marxism Today*, December 1976; D. Hallas, 'The CP, the SWP and the Rank and File Movement', *International Socialism* 95 (February 1977).
16 Statement of the London District of the Communist Party, *The London Campaigner* (Bulletin of the London Communist Party), 19 June 1974.
17 *Morning Star*, 12 August 1977.
18 Smith, *British Communism*, p. 190; *Socialist Worker*, 9 July 1977.
19 *South London Press*, 7 October 1977. There is a fictionalised account of this conflict in R. Creffield, *Days of Hope and Broken Dreams* (Wadebridge: Inky Little Fingers, 2018), pp. 3–8.
20 D. Peers, 'Poison!', *Socialist Worker*, 9 July 1977.
21 National Front Lambeth branch, bulletin, August 1977, Searchlight Archive, Northampton University BRI/02/24.
22 W. Ellsworth-Jones, J. Ball and M. Bilton, '214 seized, 110 hurt in clashes at Front march', *Sunday Times*, 14 August 1977.
23 D. Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot 'n' Race 'n' Rock 'n' Roll* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), pp. 45–47, 45.

24 C. Rosenberg, 'Labour and the fight against fascism', *International Socialism Journal* 39 (1988), pp. 55–94.
25 Widgery, *Beating Time*, pp. 46–49.
26 Shelton, *Rock Against Racism*, p. 52.
27 Shelton, *Rock Against Racism*, pp. 52–53; Alex Carter estimates the number of anti-fascists at Lewisham as 3,000–6,000, writing that 'many' carried blunt instruments and knives but while the fascists in Shelton's image show disorientation, confusion – and possibly – the signs of physical attack, notably, none of the images show knife wounds: A. Carter, 'The dog that didn't bark? Assessing the development of "cumulative extremism" between fascists and anti-fascists in the 1970s', in N. Copsey and M. Worley (eds), *'Tomorrow Belongs to US': The British Far Right since 1967* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 90–112, 100.
28 Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 50. Thirty years later, Howe was to recall seeing himself in photographer Don McCullin's photo of the same scene: 'I cannot remember being excited that August afternoon in 1977. Passionate? Yes. Pleasantly victorious? That too': D. Howe, 'Don McCullin', *New Statesman*, 13 August 2007.
29 'John Tyndall's vision', Camerawork, *Lewisham: What Are You Taking Pictures For?* (London: Half Moon Photography Workshop, 1977), p. 6; Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 48.
30 Widgery, *Beating Time*, pp. 45–47; Rosenberg, 'Labour and the fight', pp. 55–92, 75–79.
31 *Women's Voice*, September 1978; *CARF* 3 (October–November 1977), p. 11.
32 P. Dobbie and D. Meilton, 'March victim's secret', *Evening News*, 15 August 1978; The back-cover of M. Webster, *Lifting the Lid Off the 'Anti-Nazi League'* (London: NFN Press, 1978) reproduces a photograph of the 72-year-old Ms Sizer, who is said to have marched only because she was 'fearful that she [would] be a mugger's victim', the same source also acknowledges that she had been a member of the NF for five years.
33 S. Beauman, 'What lies behind the Front', *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 October 1977.
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35 *Sunday People*, 14 August 1977; *Daily Mail*, 15 August 1977; 'Thug law', *Daily Express*, 15 August 1977; *New Statesman and Nation*, 29 September 1977; D. Bence and P. Connew, 'Why the Union Jack ran red with blood', *Daily Mirror*, 15 August 1977.
36 C. Reiss, 'Jim puts ban on marches', *Evening Standard*, 15 August 1977.
37 C. Bambery, *Killing the Nazi Menace* (London: Bookmarks, 1992); p. 33; 'Liberals call for ban on Front marches', *The Times*, 15 August 1977; Rosenberg, 'Labour and the fight', p. 77.
38 Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 49.
39 *CARF* 3 (October–November 1977), p. 10.
40 J. Pearce, *Race with the Devil: My Journey from Racial Hatred to Rational Love* (Charlotte, NC: St Benedict Press, 2013), p. 51.
41 J. Bean, *Many Shades of Black: Inside Britain's Far Right* (London: Millennium, 1999), p. 214. The plan is also criticised by a later NF member in T. Simms, *Match Day: Ulster Loyalism and the British Far-Right* (London: Create Space, 2016), pp. 70–71.
42 M. Webster, 'The Lewisham outrage', *Spearhead*, July 1977, p. 17.
43 J. Tyndall to Rt. Hon. J. Callaghan, 18 August 1977, National Archives, HO 418/26.

6

EVEN GOD HAS JOINED THE ANTI-NAZI LEAGUE

Although, after Lewisham, much of the press coverage was hostile to the anti-fascists, some voices were raised in the protesters' defence. In the *NME*, Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons wrote that 'Too few people are carrying the responsibility for all of us. But perhaps you think this wasn't your battle. Tell it to the blacks. Tell it to SWP. Tell it to Rock against Racism.' Tom Picton of *Camerawork* criticised the national press: 'None of [the papers] will accept that it is a violent act to march through any community, mouthing racist slogans and carrying racist placards.' The IMG's *Socialist Challenge* argued that Lewisham had been 'a defeat for the police and government'. In the *Jewish Chronicle*, a paper which had often been critical of the left, Philip Kleinman wrote that 'When [the National Front] marches through an area with a large immigrant population, its purpose is precisely the same as that of Mosley's blackshirts; to stir up communal strife with the hope of reaping an electoral advantage.' He insisted that 'whatever their defects, the Trotskyists have the right attitude to the National Front and should not be left alone to stop its provocations'.[1]

After Lewisham, the SWP proposed an anti-fascist pact. Before the protest, this had been conceived either as an alliance of the Trotskyist groups or as a united front with the Communist Party. Now what was considered was a much broader alliance, to include middle-of-the-road Labour MPs. The most detailed account of the unity proposals appears in Dave Widgery's book, *Beating Time*.[2] 'The SWP', he writes, 'made the decision to broaden the base of the anti-fascist movement by initiating the Anti-Nazi League.' But why was this extra breadth needed?

The SWP's publications gave the impression that in the aftermath of Lewisham the far left had achieved a heroic and probably decisive victory over fascism. This was the message of *Socialist Worker*: 'We stopped the Nazis — and we'll do it again!'[3]

It would be more accurate to say that the left was poised between threat and opportunity. In the short term, socialists were confronted by a wounded opponent,

with the NF having every motive to escalate its violence. In August and September 1977, National Front supporters threatened socialists including Wandsworth Labour MP Tom Cox,[4] and attacked and set fire to the SWP's headquarters.[5] In November, National Front parliamentary candidate George Wright was fined after smashing the windows of Bradford's Left Club. In the same month, another Front supporter in Bradford, Charles Appleyard, was jailed for eighteen months after stabbing a member of the SWP, Gary Whiting.[6] With around 12,000 members, the National Front's membership outnumbered the SWP's at least three to one. The Front's supporters were predominantly male, relatively young and unafraid of using violence.

In the aftermath of Lewisham, the SWP's central committee was divided, with no coherent shared perspective. The range of opinions among the leadership spanned from those who believed that the organisation needed to defend itself, preparing for an unforgiving period of arrests and harassment from the Front, to those who thought that their party was in the news and should seek to recruit rapidly, with a view to doubling its membership in no more than a few weeks.[7]

The emphasis on recruitment was backed up by articles in SWP publications. Members of the group would speak to contacts made during anti-fascist demonstrations and encourage them, at the very least, to subscribe to *Socialist Worker*.[8] Among those who joined after Lewisham was Albie Lythgoe in Merseyside, the son of an anti-racist docker. No long before, a number of black kids at his school had been bullied by Front supporters. Albie and his friend Joe stood up for them. He recalls that 'Lewisham had a real impact on me. We were looking for a left group to join. On the telly it said that the SWP were the boot-boys of the left, and we were boot-boys in Liverpool. We said we'll have a bit of this.' But those SWP members who expected their party to grow were to be disappointed. Earlier in the decade it had acquired a modest but real industrial cadre and now, in circumstances of trade union decline, the party was having real difficulty just in holding what it had. The SWP's membership peaked at a little less than 5,000 at the end of 1975 and was down to 2,000–3,000 by the decade's end. The influx of younger recruits could not make up for the loss of older members affected by redundancies.[9]

The plan to set up the Anti-Nazi League was formulated by Jim Nichol, the SWP's national secretary and a key part of the group's leadership but on its more cautious wing. Nichol was a product of the monolithic Labour left of the North East. His father was a miner who had worked in Walbottle Colliery near Newcastle and his mother had arrived in the North East from Ireland. Nichol left school at age 15 and was hospitalised for months with tuberculosis. He joined IS in his teens. A previous chapter has described how in 1968 he rode with a fellow International Socialist Terry Barrett to leaflet the London dockers against Powell.

Widgery names Nichol as the man who took the decision to form the Anti-Nazi League and suggests that a first informal meeting to discuss the idea was held at Nichol's Stoke Newington home, two weeks before Lewisham. Afterwards:

> Nichol went first to the late Douglas Tilbey, Quaker Labour Party member, magistrate and OBE, 'a really nice guy, very principled on the question of race and always had a bit time for the SWP.' Tilbey thought it was an excellent idea. Then Nichol put the scheme to Tassaduq Ahmed, a middle-of-the-road Bangladeshi who had been in Britain since 1963 . . . Tassaduq relayed to him the concern he also felt about the number of factions that existed within the black communities. The next barometer was Michael Seifert, the lawyer and Communist Party member, because of his links with trade-union bureaucracy people like Ken Gill, George Guy and Alan Sapper – whose blessing was also going to prove essential. Nichol recalls, 'I said, "Mike, this is only really going to work if it gets the support of the CP and the left TU leaders. What do you think?" Mike said, "I think it's a bloody great idea. But I'm sorry, the CP won't, they'll crucify you. So I'll not mention it to anyone."'[10]

The most important of these moves was the approach to Michael Seifert. Short, squat and bespectacled, but with eyes that lit up when he laughed, the solicitor may have been a loyal Communist but he was the opposite of a sectarian. A roll-call of Seifert's clients in the 1970s covered almost the entire spectrum of the extra-parliamentary left, from Angry Brigade proponents of the propaganda of the deed to the Stalinist General Secretaries mentioned by Widgery.[11] He was of Jewish heritage and proud of the part his comrades had played in the Battle of Cable Street. An ecumenical anti-fascist, he had even on one occasion addressed a meeting of the IS in Tottenham, speaking on the politics of the black radicals, Angela Davis and George Jackson. If Seifert was unable to persuade his comrades, no one else could.

In the aftermath of the fighting at Lewisham, Jim Nichol again proposed an alliance against the Front: 'We were going nowhere with the CP, IMG, Workers Fight . . . Any meeting [restricted to the left groups outside Labour] would have been a meeting of four people in a darkened room.' Nichol was clear about the politics of the campaign, 'It would have to be a complete single issue that excluded nobody. If you were for fighting Nazis that was it.' He was struggling, however, to find the right name: 'I was toying with calling it the League Against Nazis and Racists.'

Nichol asked another member of the SWP, Paul Holborow, to lead the campaign. Holborow was a former public schoolboy – dry, hard-working and ambitious, and without Nichol's modesty or self-deprecating humour. It took some time for the idea to sink in: 'I said we needed a Secretary for this new campaign. At first, Paul wasn't interested, he thought by Secretary I meant someone who could type.'

Holborow's first task was to recruit a fellow leader from outside the SWP. A member of the Labour Party was needed, preferably with trade union connections. In 1977, Peter Hain was a trade union official in his late twenties. He had arrived in Britain some eleven years before, an exile from apartheid South Africa. He had been one of the best-known campaigners in the Stop the Seventy campaign against the touring South African rugby side. He had also been for several years a leader of

the Young Liberals. In September 1976, he had begun working as a research officer for the postal workers' union. The following year he joined the Labour Party and it was soon after this move that Hain was invited to help launch the Anti-Nazi League. 'If I hadn't joined the Labour Party,' he reflects, 'I doubt I would have been approached.'

After Peter Hain, the next contact was Ernie Roberts of the engineers' union and an SWP ally in campaigns against youth unemployment. According to Holborow:

> [Roberts] had been assistant general secretary of the engineering workers' union for 30 years. He had always been interested in the political dimension of building the rank and file. He had cut his teeth in the Coventry tool-room disputes of the 1940s. He had an immense following on the left. For years, he had been editing *Engineering Voice*, which functioned as the broad left in the industry. He was never in the Communist Party and never identified with the Soviet Union but worked closely with the Communists.[12]

A launch meeting was held in autumn 1977, at the House of Commons. An ad hoc steering committee was elected and the three executive positions of organiser, press officer and treasurer were taken by Holborow, Hain and Roberts.[13] Other members of the committee included four MPs, Martin Flannery, Dennis Skinner, Audrey Wise and Neil Kinnock, a former Young Liberal Simon Hebditch and Maurice Ludmer the editor of *Searchlight*, as well as Nigel Harris of the SWP and the actress Miriam Karlin, who had made her name playing working-class Jewish women in comedies.[14] A seat was also reserved in case the Communist Party came on board later.[15] Peter Hain describes some of the individuals who joined:

> Neil Kinnock had a very non-sectarian approach – he didn't want to spend ages debating racism. He wanted the movement to work. Dennis and Martin brought the Tribunite MPs. Audrey completely threw herself into the movement. Miriam was very important in the Jewish community. She was completely frustrated by the sectarianism – you don't just see it in the left parties, it was there in the Labour Party, in the Jewish community.

Mike Barton was a member of the 7/84 theatre group. Shortly after the launch of the Anti-Nazi League, he was invited to work for the League full-time: 'Soon we were having so many calls for leaflets that it became a kind of despatch room, packing leaflets, tying them together with string.'

Nigel Harris was tasked with signing up prominent left-wingers. Among other targets, Harris wrote to Edward Thompson and John Saville, the two formerly Communist historians who had launched the first New Left in 1950s Britain: 'Thompson wrote back saying, "This whole thing is a front for the Socialist Workers Party and you must think I'm an idiot to ask me." Saville wrote back, "Of course it's a front but it's a good cause and it's alright by me."'

The League also approached a number of figures from the arts world. The writers Arnold Wesker and Keith Waterhouse agreed to sponsor the League, as did Warren Mitchell, who played Alf Garnett in *Till Death Do Us Part* and Bill Owen who played Compo in *Last of the Summer Wine*. Other early supporters of the ANL included actors Alfie Bass and Prunella Scales, comedians Dave Allen and Derek Griffiths and authors Iris Murdoch and Melvyn Bragg. Crystal Palace manager Terry Venables joined, along with Nottingham Forest's manager Brian Clough.[16] A few years before, the latter had described an African team at the World Cup as 'a load of spear-chuckers who still eat each other'. But according to one League supporter Bev Bennett, 'signing up Brian Clough was seen as a terrific coup. I remember SWP comrades being more excited about this than any number of politicians who joined.'

For Hain, part of the League's success can be credited to a decision by the SWP which agreed to moderate its politics, toning down the street violence which had proved counter-productive at Lewisham: 'The publicity around [Lewisham] was very negative. That made the more thoughtful SWP people, like Paul Holborow, think, "We've got to do this in a different way."'[17]

Jim Nichol, the man who had first conceived of the Anti-Nazi League and sent Holborow to his meeting with Hain, believes that if Hain or other Labour MPs told themselves the SWP had given up on physical confrontation they were deceiving themselves:

> It didn't work like that at all. One of the most basic positions of the Anti-Nazi League was, Keep the Nazis off the Streets. You couldn't do that without force. The people who were in the Labour Party knew full well that the Anti-Nazi League was going to mean more confrontations. They were the ones who kept silent.

Meanwhile, the launch of the Anti-Nazi League was met by other groups with scepticism. Danny Reilly of the All London Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Co-ordinating Committee was wary of SWP involvement in the new campaign. 'You've got to remember that lots of lefties were already alienated.'

The Race Today Collective were equally sceptical. According to Leila Hassan, 'We knew about the ANL and we thought it was a front for the SWP.'

The magazine *CARF* was cautious in its welcome:

> There have been certain fears expressed by local anti-fascist campaigns that such a large national body might swamp local activity and initiative. But since the Anti-Nazi League is specifically geared towards fighting fascism at elections and will most probably dissolve after the next general election, the aims of local campaigns seem to complement rather than compete with the aims of the Anti-Nazi League . . . Campaigns can in fact take this opportunity to make full use of the propaganda available from the Anti-Nazi League. It is after all the local campaigns which will have to stand the test of time.[18]

The libertarian Marxists of Big Flame distrusted the Anti-Nazi League, fearing both the top-down instincts of the Labour MPs and the prospect of the group's domination by the SWP. But the link with RAR eased fears a little. Big Flame's Max Farrar spoke at a national conference of Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Committees, where he proposed that the Committees should affiliate to the League. The veteran black theorist Ambalavaner Sivanandan opposed affiliation, noting Farrar's enthusiasm for RAR and describing him as 'a young punk'. The motion was however passed.[19]

The first squaddists

While the main response of the SWP to Lewisham was the decision to launch the Anti-Nazi League, other and quite different plans were also canvassed. In summer 1977, in response to National Front attacks on SWP paper-sellers at Lewisham, John Deason of the SWP's central committee sounded out a group of people to discuss self-defence. A meeting was held at a pub in Southwark. According to the docker Micky Fenn, the local SWP group was 'in a state of disintegration'. The NF 'slung bottles of paraquat at them, slung bricks at them, iron bars at them . . . They were very, very frightened . . . But we tried to calm them down.'[20] In Fenn's memory, a plan was made to establish five groups each composed of five SWP members, with these squads based around SWP groups in north London, inner east London and outer east London. They were then used to protect *Socialist Worker* sales in Hoxton and Newham.

Deason was a charismatic organiser, a former engineer from Newton-le-Willows in Greater Manchester. He had come to London after his employer had announced a wave of redundancies. The workers in the factory had occupied the plant in his defence and remained on strike for seven weeks before admitting defeat.[21]

To what extent was his meeting with Fenn and others sanctioned by the rest of the SWP leadership? The SWP's then national secretary, Jim Nichol, is best-placed to know. He pauses however before answering. 'If it happened,' he says, 'it was Deason going off by himself. You have to remember that on the Central Committee, we didn't discuss everything, we each had our own areas of responsibility. We were freelancers.'

Nichol acknowledges that by summer 1977, SWP members on the docks[22] had taken on an unofficial role as the security team for a number of events, and not merely the RAR gigs whose security arrangements are described by Widgery. In Nichol's words:

> There is no doubt that left-wing dockers took it upon themselves to confront the NF. In particular there was an individual Tony Delaney;[23] he was a docker at Jamaica Street, East London and he would take no nonsense. I talked to Delaney many times and I would smile and not take too close an interest.

From summer 1977, Micky Fenn, Micky O'Farrell from Hatfield SWP and others were being referred to informally as members of an SWP 'squad'. At this stage and for several years afterwards, the term carried no negative connotations.

Plans to Hyde

After the decision had been taken in London to establish the Anti-Nazi League, but before the campaign had been formally launched, the nascent campaign encountered an early challenge with the news that the Front was proposing to march through Hyde in Manchester. According to Geoff Brown, '[Martin] Webster was trying to regroup the Front after Lewisham. That's why they put so much effort into Hyde.' Brown walked around Hyde for a day planning a counter-protest

> It would be easy to block any march. The main road goes through a series of underpasses, we would have four opportunities to block the road. [Manchester Chief Constable James] Anderton must also have done the same [walk-around] and thought it through like us.

Home Office papers in the National Archives show that Brown's hunch was correct: Anderton had scouted the route and judged it impracticable, 'unnecessarily long' and too close to building sites which would provide 'arsenals' for anti-fascist protesters. He travelled to London, where he met Labour's Home Secretary Mervyn Rees. On his return, Anderton announced that the Front would not be allowed to march through Hyde after all. This ban was publicised, receiving the full support of the national press and high-profile politicians including Lord Hailsham for the Conservatives.[24] Behind the scenes, the decision was taken that the National Front would be allowed to march and receive full police protection, on what Anderton promised Rees would be a different and 'strictly limited' route.[25]

On the morning of Saturday, 8 October 1977, anti-fascists divided into three groups. The largest contingent of anti-fascists, marshalled by the SWP's Jim Nichol, headed for Stockport. Press reports seemed to suggest that if there was going to be a Front march, it would begin there. Another smaller section of about two hundred people remained in Hyde, in case the Front decided to defy the supposed police ban. Another group, of about the same number, waited in Manchester town centre. They were to be kept in reserve, in case either of the other two contingents were caught out.

These three groups of anti-fascists were to have very different experiences. The first group in Stockport found themselves waiting all day for a march that never took place. The second group were no more successful. In Hyde, Martin Webster of the Front conducted a one-man march, defended by over 2,500 officers. Ramilla Patel of the Asian Youth Movement walked in front of him the whole way with a placard which read, 'This man is a Nazi.' Anti-fascists were able to heckle Webster and disrupt his parade but could not prevent his demonstration.[26]

The third group of anti-fascists, the reserve, clashed repeatedly with the Front. Seven hundred members of the National Front assembled in Levenshulme. There were scuffles the whole way along Kirkmanshulme Lane, but the Front contingent was able to reach its destination intact.

For Owen Leeds, this was the first time he had seen the Front's steel-pointed Union Jack Dr Marten boots and shaved heads up close:

> I had shoulder-length hair and was busy growing my first beard . . . when this NF guy made eye contact with me and shouted, 'You're the next Kevin Gateley, you're gonna die you long-haired communist bastard.' Needless to say I found this quite disturbing.[27]

Naming the Front Nazis

The Anti-Nazi League's founding statement was sent to the press in November 1977:

> For the first time since Mosley in the thirties there is the worrying prospect of a Nazi party gaining significant support in Britain . . . The leaders, philosophy and origins of the National Front and similar organisations followed directly from the Nazis in Germany . . . They must not go unopposed. Ordinary voters must be made aware of the threat that lies behind the National Front. In every town, in every factory, in every school, on every housing estate, wherever the Nazis attempt to organise they must be countered.[28]

From the perspective of the Labour Party, one of the attractions of the Anti-Nazi League was that it was a central source of anti-fascist knowledge which could be drawn on at election time. An early test for the League came in November 1977, with a by-election at Bournemouth East. Some 25,000 ANL factsheets were distributed, mainly (according to Jim Nichol) by Benny Grower, a Jewish member of the Labour Party and a local councillor: 'We could do posters but he [i.e. Grower] was the one running the show.' Two east London businesses donated paper to the campaign: it showed up by the lorry-load. In the election, Kenneth McKilliam of the National Front came fifth with just 725 votes, a mere 3 per cent of the total.[29]

In Bournemouth and afterwards, ANL materials exposed the fascist politics of the Front. The strategy of the ANL was to focus on the most extreme expressions of racism, in order to demonstrate that racism of all sorts was wrong.

To that end, John Tyndall was shown on Anti-Nazi leaflets wearing a Nazi uniform. Tyndall and Martin Webster were exposed through the words they had used. Martin Webster's article, 'Why I am a Nazi' was used against him. '*Mein Kampf* is my doctrine,' Tyndall had said. Other ANL leaflets described the history of Nazi Germany and what life was like under fascism for women or for Jews.

The NF leadership protested that they were being criticised for things they had written a decade or more before. Martin Webster had long complained about the 'printing and distribution of criminally libellous "smear" leaflets attacking the National

Front', warning that if the police failed to prosecute, 'the National Front will make such arrangements as circumstances indicate are necessary to secure its survival in what will have proved to be an unfree, undemocratic, unfair and violent society'.[30]

An anonymous Front defector explained to the East End local press in 1977 that the first time she began to reconsider her membership was 'when she saw a picture of the NF's leader John Tyndall wearing jackboots and sporting a swastika. "I won't stand for any of this 'Zieg Heil' nonsense," she said.'[31]

Workers against the Nazis

During its first year, the Anti-Nazi League won the endorsement of a large number of trade unions. Twenty national union executives voted to back the alliance. Six hundred workplace organisations affiliated to the League. Among them were ANL groups of workers in large factories such as British Leyland's Longbridge plant and Ford at Dagenham, as well as Yorkshire miners, civil servants and local government workers. Bill Keys, general secretary of the print union SOGAT, addressed League rallies in northern England as well as marches in London. There were also ANL groups set up for printworkers on Fleet Street and for technicians and TV journalists.

In Manchester, Larry Aitken and other members of the Fire Brigades' Union from New Mills Fire Station helped to raise funds for the campaign. Elsewhere, the technicians' union ACTT worked with the Anti-Nazis in arguing that the National Front's TV broadcasts should be banned. One journalist, Francis Wheen, rang Alan Sapper, general secretary of the ACTT, and asked him whether silencing the Front would prove counter-productive. 'Democracy is threatened,' Sapper replied. 'We can discuss democracy until the concentration camps come in.'[32]

Rail Against the Nazis included members of the rail unions RMT, ASLEF and TSSA, with supporters in London and the North West. Their banner showed a high-speed train knocking over a gang of Nazis. Members of King's Cross ASLEF played a leading role. King's Cross had not always had a reputation as a left-wing depot. In recent years, NF supporters had worked there. But now, the depot was younger and more mixed. One member of the ASLEF branch, Leno Carraro, was arrested at Lewisham in 1977. The branch voted to pay his fine for him.[33]

Rail Against the Nazis supporters in the North West included Paul Salveson, a member of the Labour Party and Declan O'Neill, a long-standing Irish socialist, then working in a booking office on the Altrincham line: 'We organised fringe meetings at union conferences and tried to isolate self-declared Nazis in the union.'

John Robson was an ASLEF activist on the London Underground. He had been in his depot for six months and in all that time the branch had not succeeded in holding a single quorate meeting: 'We never had more than six.' One or two of the train drivers were seen wearing racist badges: 'One day, I put up a poster saying that at the next meeting we would affiliate to the ANL. About

fifty people came and there was a big row but we affiliated. After that the branch never looked back.'

Mike Beaken was an unemployed engineer. He worked briefly as a full-time organiser for the ANL in Preston and then in Nottingham. In Preston, the fire-fighters' union and the postal workers' union backed the League, as did the joint shop stewards' committee at Leyland Motors. The convenor at Leyland's, Len Brindle, backed the League. In Nottingham, the League also received support from the white-collar union ASTMS and the teachers' union.

In Manchester, members of the Communist Party ran the engineering union. Consequently, Communist support was essential if a mass movement was to be built. The Trades Council and the divisional council of the engineers' union AEU both passed resolutions of support. The Manchester Teachers' Association, white-collar workers in ASTMS's Central Manchester branch and nurses in COHSE at Ladywell Hospital also gave their backing to the League, as did the rail workers' NUR union.

John Walker was then an 'ageing hippie' living in the south of the city:

> I remember we did one cleaning of paint from buildings. The Nazis had been putting up slogans for some time . . . One local factory, there were about twenty people inside. We came in and spoke to the local steward. He was known locally as a strong Communist. He said, that was fine, he'd already been trying to get management to paint it out. The union provided a ladder. Several workers took badges. They all supported what we were doing.

Under the pressure of the anti-fascist campaign, even some of the Front's former strongholds began to weaken. Mark Dolan was working as a postman from the North Delivery Office in Islington:

> When I started, the NF ran the branch committee. They used to collect openly on the shop-floor. The collections paid the deposit so that the NF could stand in elections . . . One day, soon after I started, I was in the toilets. This old guy came in and asked me for 50p for the NF. I'd come from a school in Hackney, it was black, Asian, Greek, Turkish. I thought he was joking, he was having a laugh. He cornered me.

Dolan pushed the older man back. In the weeks after this confrontation he could see the balance of power change: 'Outside affected the inside. The Anti-Nazi League, the marches, Rock Against Racism, it had its weight in the workplace. Within a couple of years, the NF had gone altogether.'

Perhaps the most striking example of Anti-Nazi League success came on the docks. Early on, socialist dockers set themselves the task of undoing the defeat they had suffered in 1968, when they had marched in support of Enoch Powell's racist 'Rivers of Blood' speech. The port of London shop stewards' committee voted

to affiliate to the League. Numerous left-wing dockers contributed to this shift, including Bob Light, Eddie Prevost and Micky Fenn.

Fenn, who was for several years a key figure in defending RAR gigs and other left-wing events, is the subject of a story told by Mike Barton:

> There was one guy Johnny, a lightweight boxer. His brother Micky [Fenn] was an anti-fascist docker. One day, Johnny came on a demo, with his face half covered in bandages. There was a skinhead watching him, all the time. Finally the skinhead shouts, 'It's you!' Maybe they'd fought together in the ring. 'You race traitor!' So Johnny starts pulling his arms out and back, as if he was wearing braces. What he meant was 'Me, sir? A race traitor? No, sir. I'm Irish.' That was important. The Nazi could only think in terms of race and Jimmy turned it on its head.

University, schools, football

Dozens of Anti-Nazi League groups were set up, including Aardvarks Against the Nazis, Skateboarders Against the Nazis, Vegetarians Against the Nazis and more.[34] Patrons of a pub in Rusholme, Manchester, organised their own group, The Albert Against the Nazis, with a badge and banner. Many of these groups were little more than a badge, while others met regularly and had a periphery of supporters. Some of the most visible were groups for students and football fans.

Eighteen colleges or university students unions affiliated to the League: Bedford College, Bradford University, Bristol University, Ealing College of Higher Education, Edge Hill College, Essex University, Exeter University, Liverpool Polytechnic, Loughborough University, Manchester Polytechnic, Newman College, St Peter's College in Oxford, Central London Polytechnic, the Polytechnic of Wales, the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of Surrey, Sussex University and Teesside Poly. Twelve national student societies also affiliated, including the Union of Jewish Students,[35] and the national bodies for Labour and Liberal students.

David Rosenberg was a member of Leeds Students Union: 'I worked on the ANL stall which we put on frequently in the Union building. Our main job was to sell badges and promote the ANL literature. Students were generally very receptive.' Students from Leeds University helped to leaflet Leeds United's ground, Elland Road.

Einde O'Callaghan, a veteran of the Lewisham protest, was on the executive of the City University Union Society:

> We won affiliation of CUUS to the ANL right from the beginning, despite opposition from some of the Broad Left members of the executive and some leading members of the Jewish Society – they weren't happy about the SWP's anti-Zionist position.

City was seen as an apolitical university:

> It was a predominantly a technological university with a large number of traditionally apolitical engineers and scientists and a much smaller number of social scientists who tended to be more progressive. There was little overt hostility, except from the real right-wing Tories, who were dyed-in-the-wool racists anyway.

John Diamond was studying in Manchester. 'At one meeting of the Poly branch of the Anti-Nazi League, members of the International Marxist Group showed up.' In a shift from their group's previous positions, the IMG supporters were critical of the Anti-Nazi League, insisting that the group was wrong in principle to emphasise anti-fascism at the expense of anti-racism:

> The debate was had. It wasn't a foregone conclusion. It was important to understand why the Anti-Nazi League and not something broader. There is a need to oppose all forms of racism but when the far-right are organising you must do something about that.

Aware of these manoeuvres, the Front made some efforts of its own to recruit students, with supporters at Manchester University publishing two single-page copies of a leaflet, 'Phoenix: Voice of the Anti-Communist Student'.[36]

The Front had noticeably more success among school students. Joe Pearce established a youth paper, *Bulldog*. Youth NF leaflets included one titled, 'How to Spot a Red Teacher'. The press ran a series of articles about his activities.[37]

School Kids Against the Nazis (SKAN) was formed to counter Pearce's efforts. Its magazine claimed a sale of 8,000 copies per issue, with readers' groups in Sheffield, Enfield, Reading, Canterbury, Brighton and High Wycombe.[38] Its letters included one from Cathy, a 15-year-old former NF supporter from Derby:

> I do not like their violent ways of dealing with people and their rules set down. I wouldn't like to see everyone in uniform or going into the army upon leaving school. I like people who like to be individuals, in clothes and mind. If everyone followed the NF Nazis we would be like cabbages, doing everything the same as everyone else . . . .[39]

The *NME* ran a piece about School Kids Against the Nazis, reporting on a victory when six supporters of the National Front had tried to hold a meeting at Barton Peveril College in Hampshire and fifty other students had occupied the room, covering it in Anti-Nazi stickers and preventing the meeting from going ahead. The following month, *Women's Voice* conducted a series of interviews with Josie, Karen and Doreen, three school students who had set up a SKAN group in Walthamstow: 'Our school may not have different sexes in it, but we do have

different races and we all got along well together. There was no way the Front were going to destroy that.'[40]

The National Front had long been targeting football supporters. 'I think there's a lot you can do with soccer hooligans,' Martin Webster told BBC's *Panorama*. 'People do like to identify: they do like to associate themselves with something which is big and glorious and noble with which they, the little individual, can associate themselves and feel proud that they somehow belong.'[41]

John Berry of the *Leveller* described attending Spurs home matches and hearing chants of 'TYN-DALL . . . TYN-DALL' – 'a regular feature on Saturday afternoons'. Berry interviewed Martin, a young supporter of the National Front:

> Martin H is twenty-one. Half of that time has been spent in children's homes, detention centres, community school and Borstal. His parents are divorced. He never went to school except when he was in care and [is] barely able to read. Most of the time he reads war comics in which gigantic and heroic British army sergeants single-handedly decimate battalions of Huns to whom they frequently refer as 'Nazi scum' . . . In his own words Martin joined [the NF] because 'the Front stands up for English people. The socialists want more niggers and Pakis here because they vote for them. We kick the fuck out of the wogs. The reds are always stirring up trouble. Someone's got to stop them.'[42]

Spurs was also home to the first Football Fans Against the Nazis group, Spurs Against the Nazis (SAN). Richard Atkinson recalls seeing a group of Front supporters already leafleting outside White Hart Lane when the first anti-fascist leafleters arrived: 'There were a lot more of them . . . We had all these old Jewish men walk up to us and say, "You're doing a really good job, lads" and then walk off.' Worrying as it was to be left alone, 'We then saw a crowd of about fifty teenagers, quite young, running towards us. We were really scared. But they ran right past us, charged into the National Front lot and kicked them off their pitch. After that, it was fine.'[43]

Spurs Against the Nazis' first public meeting was attended by sixty people. The *Hornsey Journal* supported the campaign, even when Spurs' directors attempted to sue the group for using Spurs' symbols on the leaflets. Spurs Against the Nazis celebrated the arrival of Oswaldo Ardiles and Ricardo Villa ('You're Welcome Here') as a victory against immigration control. The group organised a five-a-side football competition which involved some forty-four teams, including one from the band Aswad and which was won by a team of drivers and conductors from Tottenham bus garage, with the comedians Peter Cook and Bill Oddie of the Goodies refereeing.[44]

At Sheffield Wednesday, anti-fascists painted out NF graffiti which was left for a season beside the players' entrance. Football Fans Against the Nazis (FFAN) groups were formed at around twenty further clubs including West Bromwich Albion, Swansea, Oxford, Barnsley, Coventry, Everton, Norwich and Arsenal.

Campaign – or front?

The growth of the Anti-Nazi League was not universally welcomed, even on the left. After all, the League had begun as a cautious alliance between the Labour Party and the SWP. Even after the League had been launched, these two parties still had different politics and different approaches to confronting the NF. In the aftermath of Lewisham, Labour's Home Secretary Mervyn Rees had criticised both the Front and the SWP as 'extremist political factions . . . intent on violence', and hinted at a more robust use of the Public Order Act to ban Front demonstrations. Over the subsequent months, the focus of mainstream Labour opinion was on persuading the Home Secretary to use his powers to prohibit Front's marches, with Labour MPs Norman Atkinson, Ian Mikardo and Joan Lestor among the most insistent advocates of a ban.[45]

The continued distrust of the SWP expressed itself in the decision of Joan Lestor, Labour MP and former editor of *Searchlight*, to launch a Joint Committee Against Racialism (JCAR) in December 1977.[46] JCAR also attracted support from the Liberal Party, the British Council of Churches. and the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Stan Taylor described JCAR as an 'alternative to the ANL for moderates'.[47]

The presence of the pro-Palestinian SWP within the Anti-Nazi League was a particular source of tension with the Board of Deputies. Writing in *The Times*, William Frankel described the Board's hostility towards the League's demonstrations, 'which, they say, [lead] to "punch-ups" and to the publicity on which the National Front thrives'.[48] According to *Leveller* magazine:

> Officially non-partisan, the Board is inherently conservative – even if only with a small c – and strongly Zionist. The formulation 'Zionism equals racism' has led to campaigns on some campuses which, Board leaders believe, has spilled over into anti-Semitism. On top of that the belief of the left that racism is built into capitalism this has meant a general political stance unacceptable to many of the Board's supporters in the Jewish community. Both sides in that particular row have, after much anguished discussion, agreed to peaceful co-existence. SWP supporters, like ANL full-timer Paul Holborow, play down their anti-Zionism in ANL public meetings while Jacob Gerwitz, director of the Board's Defence and Group Relations department says: 'We have a sincere feeling that the public argument wasn't very healthy. We accept that they are there to fight the Nazis. Our sole worry is the SWP control.'[49]

The *New Statesman* magazine, a voice of the Labour left since the 1930s, ran a front page article, 'In defence of the Anti-Nazis':

> [The Anti-Nazi League's] National Secretary, Paul Holborrow [*sic*], is a member of the SWP. But most of the other members of the steering committee, Peter Hain, Neil Kinnock, MP, Audrey Wise, MP, Ernie Roberts

> et al. are scarcely Trots, whatever else they may be. Suppose that Mr Holborrow and his SWP friends were, with manipulative cunning, to try and turn the ANL away from its simple anti-racialist platform and towards some sinister purpose of their own – nationalising the mustard-factories perhaps or substituting Vanessa Redgrave for the Queen – is it really plausible that they should succeed?

'It is a long time', the magazine concluded, 'since the Comintern days when "fronts" really were marched and counter-marched with clockwork precision.'[50]

Notes

1 D. Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot 'n' Race 'n' Rock and Roll* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), p. 64; T. Parsons and J. Burchill, 'Dedicated followers of fascism', *New Musical Express*, 20 August 1978; T. Picton, 'What the papers said', Camerawork, *Lewisham*, p. 7; T. Ali, 'The lessons of Lewisham', *Socialist Challenge*, 1 September 1977; *The Times*, 15 August 1977. Anti-fascists also received a sympathetic treatment in T. Gopsill and S. Haywood, 'Law without order', *Time Out*, 19–25 August 1978, and 'Our day of shame', *Hornsey Journal*, 19 August 1977.
2 Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 50.
3 A. Callinicos and A. Hatchett, 'In defence of violence', *International Socialism* 101 (September 1977), pp. 3–6.
4 P. Oliver, 'Front "avengers" stop Labour MP's speech', *Guardian*, 8 September 1977.
5 L. Gill, 'Left wing HQ gutted', *Evening Standard*, 31 August 1977; 'What the Nazis did to our HQ', *Socialist Worker*, 10 September 1977.
6 *Evening Post*, 26 November 1977.
7 Nichol was among the pessimists. For the optimists, such as Steve Jeffreys, see I. Birchall, *Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time* (London: Bookmarks, 2011), p. 426.
8 N. Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2017), p. 129.
9 Figures from Jim Nichol. He says that the SWP had 3,000 members in 1979. Ian Birchall suggests the decline was even sharper and that the organisation had just 2,000 members at the decade's end. It should be borne in mind that in the aftermath of the first ANL Carnival, recruitment was said to be running at 150 a month or just under 2,000 a year. Perhaps the only way that these two sets of figures can be combined is if you think of an inner SWP core of about 500 people who were members of the group in both 1970 and 1980. Around this core, there was a fluctuating membership which was replaced almost in its entirety, first between 1970 and 1975 and then again between 1975 and 1979.
10 Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 50.
11 J. Deighton, 'Michael Seifert', *Guardian*, 9 August 2017.
12 Roberts' memories of this period are in E. Roberts, *Strike Back* (Orpington: Ernie Roberts, 1994), pp. 251–254.
13 *New Society*, 11 May 1978; Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 49.
14 The ANL's Founding Statement was reproduced in *Searchlight*, November 1977.
15 In 1977, the offer was declined, although Bill Dunn, the London district industrial organiser for the Communist Party, did join the ANL steering committee in spring 1978, following the first RAR carnival. From the same point, the CP as a whole turned towards support for the ANL with its publications celebrating 'the magnificent ANL Carnival', *London Communists*, 11 May 1978.
16 Various of Clough's anti-Front statements are quoted in *Socialist Worker*, 17 December 1977.

17 D. Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge* (London: Picador, 2016), p. 124. The ANL's launch is explained in similar terms in Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, p. 126.
18 'Anti-Nazi League', *CARF* 3 (winter 1977–1978), p. 5.
19 M. Farrar and K. McDonnell, *Big Flame: Rethinking Radical Politics* (London: Merlin, forthcoming).
20 S. Birchall, *Beating the Fascists: The Untold Story of Anti-Fascist Action* (London: Freedom Press, 2010), p. 38; D. Hann, *Physical Resistance, Or a Hundred Years of Anti-Fascism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2013), pp. 264–265.
21 J. Deason, 'The broad left in the AUEW', *International Socialism*, June 1975, pp. 8–16.
22 This is close to the account given by Jim Kelly: 'The acknowledged leader within Inner East London was a PE teacher from Hackney John W. Micky Fenn, a TGWU shop steward from the Royal Group of Docks led the Outer East London squad, whose core was a group of fellow dockers': J. Kelly and M. Metcalf, *The Anti-Nazi League: A Critical Examination* (London: Colin Roach Centre, 1995).
23 There are very few other accounts which mention Delaney. He is named however in Eddie Prevost's recollections of the 1972 strikes on the docks: E. Prevost, 'Vic Turner (1927–2012)', *Socialist Worker*, 12 January 2013.
24 'Ban on the Front's march but . . . will it stop the violence?', *Evening Standard*, 21 September 1977. Lord Hailsham was interviewed on BBC2's *Nationwide*, National Archives, HO 418/26.
25 'Note of a meeting held on 5 September 1977', HO 418/26.
26 S. Taylor, *The National Front in English Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 135; J. Ball and C. Ryder, 'Police foil bid to halt the Front', *Guardian*, 9 October 1977.
27 D. Renton, 'Anti-fascism in the North West 1976–1982', *North West Labour History* 27 (2002), pp. 17–28.
28 ANL, 'Founding statement', leaflet, 1977.
29 'Nazis smashed in Bournemouth', *Socialist Worker*, 3 December 1977.
30 M. Webster, 'Red violence: will we have to meet force with force?', *Spearhead* 76 (June 1974, pp. 4–5.
31 'Focus on a race hate march', *East Ender*, 19 August 1977.
32 F. Wheen, 'The National Front's reptilian aspects', *New Statesman*, 22 September 1978.
33 John Rose, *Solidarity Forever: One Hundred Years of King's Cross ASLEF* (London: King's Cross ASLEF, 1986), pp. 49, 73.
34 A spring 1979 Vegetarians Against the Nazis public meeting is reported in *Beast*, 1 June 1979.
35 For an example of UJS anti-NF materials: *The National Front: From the Inside* (London: Union of Jewish Students, 1976).
36 Searchlight Archive, Northampton University, BRI/02/023.
37 'National Front pupil paper worries schools', *Guardian,* 24 October 1977; C. Cross, 'National Front's school campaign', *Observer*, 8 January 1978; C. Lyte, 'Help us weed out Red teachers, pupils urged', *Daily Mirror*, 20 January 1978; 'NF opens junior section', *Evening Post*, 18 February 1978; 'National Front Youth Movement', *Searchlight*, November 1979.
38 D. Taylor, 'Anti-Nazi League: perspectives for the coming period (great left headlines we have known, no. 94)', *Leveller*, June 1978; also C. Coldman, 'Reading school students drive out the Nazis', *Socialist Worker*, 26 November 1977.
39 *SKAN* 6 (winter 1978), p. 10.
40 'SKAN rools OK', *New Musical Express*, 3 June 1978; *Women's Voice*, July 1978.
41 Webster was paraphrasing a passage in *Mein Kampf* in which Hitler speaks of the way demonstrations 'bur[n] into the small, wretched individual the proud conviction that, paltry worm as he was, he was nevertheless a part of a great dragon': I. Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936 Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), p. 36.
42 J. Berry, 'The National Front and . . . football', *Leveller*, March 1978.

43 D. Renton, 'Spurs Against the Nazis', *Fragments* 2 (2000), pp. 27–30.
44 'Mitre B are the champs', *Hornsey Journal*, 3 November 1978; 'Spurs spurn Anti-Nazi group', *Weekly Herald*, 16 November 1978; C. Nawrat, 'Anti-Nazis cross the great divide', *Morning Star*, 12 May 1979.
45 'Public Order – Home Office Statement', 16 August 1977 and 'Note of a meeting held on 20 September 1977', both in National Archives, HO 418/26.
46 *Labour Weekly*, 'The fight for our freedoms', no date, January 1978?
47 Copsey, *History of Anti-Fascism*, pp. 148–149.
48 W. Frankel, 'How real is the "threat" to Jews in Britain?', *The Times*, 3 November 1978; also D. Leigh, 'Jewish split on NF', *Guardian*, 3 November 1978.
49 'Out of the gloom and into the summer', *Leveller*, April 1979.
50 'In defence of the Anti-Nazis', *New Statesman*, 6 October 1978.

7

WE GOT HIGH, WE TOUCHED THE SKY

The launch of the Anti-Nazi League came at a fortunate time for Rock Against Racism. By the end of 1977, RAR was approaching its anniversary and much of the organisers' time was being taken up by efforts to woo Sham 69, the band most associated with the emerging skinhead scene. Sham 69 gigs at Kingston, the London School of Economics and Middlesex Polytechnic all ended in brawls. Security at RAR gigs was provided by the Royal Group of Docks shop stewards, with assistance from members of the construction union, UCATT.[1] Red Saunders recalls one of the dockers carrying a club hammer with a hole drilled through the end of it with a big leather strap, so that if the hammer was dropped in fighting it could be recovered and used again. Saunders had a standard speech setting out how RAR supporters were intended to protect the stage:

> If there's fascists in the audience, let's make sure people don't get backstage. Then if you lose that it's like a military retreat, then, whatever you do, protect the stage. Then if we lose the stage turn off the power so they can't use the mic to go Sieg Heil.'

The worst of the fighting was seen in the Sham 69 gig at Middlesex Poly. As the evening went on, those in charge of security became increasingly worried. At the back of the hall, a chant could be heard echoing, 'What We Got? Fuck All. National Front'. At one desperate moment, NF- and BM-supporting skinheads invaded the stage and were able to briefly grab the microphone, shouting, 'See you all up Ilford tomorrow', a reference to a Front rally taking place the next day.[2]

Eventually the Front's supporters were repulsed and the gig ended with Sham 69's Jimmy Pursey back on stage, singing with the Rasta group Misty in Roots.[3] People were complaining afterwards that RAR had allowed the NF in.

Saunders refused to apologise: 'This is the fucking real world. This is Rock Against Racism. The white working class and a reggae band and we've brought them all together.'[4]

'It was the most disturbing thing,' Pursey recalls, 'like being in a trench in the First World War . . . It was a battle I could only win by carrying on.'[5]

The physical conflicts were not limited to Sham 69 concerts; all around the country, violence between RAR-supporting bands and followers of the Front was becoming more frequent, with brawls breaking out at UK Subs and Ian Dury gigs. Andy Gill of the Gang of Four describes drinking at one Leeds pub, the Fenton, with a left-wing reputation, when about twenty Front supporters broke in: 'It was like a Wild West saloon, chairs flying everywhere, people getting hit.'[6]

Rock Against Racism was also beginning to face a criticism from musicians, with members of the original punk scene resenting RAR as newcomers or complaining about the campaign's attempts to politicise everyone around it, with Mark Perry of punk fanzine *Sniffin' Glue* complaining, 'I don't need to be told by a commie organisation to love blacks.'[7] A number of the best-known punk bands, who had previously supported Rock Against Racism were beginning to disengage from the campaign. The anarcho-punk band Crass ceased to play Rock Against Racism events,[8] as did including Ian Curtis's Joy Division. Mark E. Smith of the Fall, whose songs had previously included 'Hey Fascist' ('you're going to get it through the head') told the *NME*:

> We did a lot of gigs for Rock Against Racism and what happens is before you go on they say, 'Will you hold this poster up?' – And it's a picture of Belsen, "DON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN" . . . And I would say – we're a political band, that's what we sing about.[9]

The trend was expressed by the brief but considerable enthusiasm in winter 1977–1978 for the band Magazine, formed by Howard Devoto of Buzzcocks. In a gesture aimed at the likes of Rock Against Racism as well as the Front, Magazine's first single was titled, 'Shot By Both Sides'.[10]

What might once have felt like a sprint for the hearts and minds of young Britain was becoming something else: a nastier, longer and harder struggle.

Other signs were also pointing in the same direction. In January 1978, Margaret Thatcher's advisor Nigel Lawson wrote to his leader, warning her that if their party was to strike a 'populist note', then she had no choice but to make a direct appeal to anti-immigrant voters.[11] Later that same month, Mrs Thatcher gave an interview for Granada's *World in Action* in which she echoed Enoch Powell's warnings of the risks posed by immigration. 'We are a British nation with British characteristics,' she said:

> Every country can take some small minorities and in many ways they add to the richness and variety of this country. The moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened . . . People are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture.

Within days of her speech, the Conservatives had an eleven-point lead in the opinion polls.[12]

On 18 February 1978, the Front held a rally at the Digbeth Civil Hall in Birmingham. Five thousand anti-fascists protested, marching behind banners of the local Trades Council, constituency Labour parties, Christians Against Racism, Labour Party Young Socialists, Women's Groups, as well as the SWP and IMG. One participant, Paul Gilroy, complained that anti-fascists

> were treated with the ironic and highly significant experience of Labour Party stewards telling us not to be naughty and that we should stick to the route of the 'protest march' worked out with the police. They seemed to think it was Aldermaston 1963 not Birmingham 1978.[13]

In the Yorkshire Film Archive, there is a film of a protest in Bradford against the National Front, filmed in March or April 1978. The Front were due to hold an election meeting at Wellington Primary School in Eccleshill, with John Tyndall speaking, and protesters had gathered from the Anti-Nazi League and the Indian Workers Association. A member of the Asian Youth Movement in a green cap can be seen determinedly offering his magazine to everyone who passes. The police seem nervous and ill-equipped, just wearing black raincoats and helmets with chin straps. The anti-fascists are men and women in their twenties, with shoulder-length hair, gripping their hands against the cold. A teenage anti-fascist with shaved head, watching the police film him, dances back, showing off his new red t-shirt at the cops. Half a dozen National Front supporters walk towards their meeting, all of them men. One of this group, with thick sideburns and a camouflage top does his best to stride his arms and legs in time with the martial music playing in his head. By mid-afternoon, there are between five hundred and a thousand anti-fascists ready to oppose the main NF crowd. The arrests, when they come, seem diffident and English – almost polite.[14]

Matthew Caygill attended

> the first very big and exciting [ANL] meetings in Leeds, a local Hyde Park area meeting crammed in a school in Brudenell with at least a hundred people attending and being very impressed by [the speakers] [Evening Post journalist] Pete Lazenby and [socialist historian] John Charlton.[15]

Caygill recalls 'violent and scary confrontations in Leeds city centre',[16] and 'a glorious Saturday' in April 1978 when 'several thousand people came out to surround an NF meeting in a city centre school'.[17] Martin Webster was inside the hall, telling his supporters:

> We have been put on the defensive today by raucous beer can-throwing stinking animals. They are in fact an insult to the animal kingdom. Coming to this meeting we had to go through spit, shouts of abuse, kicks, obscenities

> and filth from these people . . . The Anti-Nazi League is the new name of an old gang. Very few of them are British . . . The Anti-Nazi League is part of the Socialist Workers Party and its organiser Paul Holborow is a member of the SWP as are nearly all of the local organisers . . . [The SWP's] organiser Tony Cliff is not the son of the English sod but an Israeli passport holder . . . .[18]

It was in middle of these events that the League approached the RAR collective with plans to put on a new and larger ANL event to take place around the time of the May 1978 local elections. Dave Widgery describes the negotiations:

> The Anti-Nazi League, founded a year after RAR but usually, on the grounds of greater respectability, regarded as the parent organisation, was anxious to hold a joint demonstration with RAR. Although none of the London local councils would help, the GLC gave permission to use Victoria Park . . . There was obvious unity of purpose between RAR and the ANL but also creative tension: we were approaching the same question from opposite directions. We agreed on the format: a juxtaposition of a political meeting in Trafalgar Square and an open-air concert in Victoria Park would make the politics more fun and the music more political. But RAR's unannounced ambition was to turn the piece into the biggest piece of revolutionary street theatre London had ever seen.[19]

Jerry Fitzpatrick was placed in charge of logistics:

> I remember booking the event through the GLC. The form said that if you had more than 10,000 people, you needed portaloos and all that. So I booked a mini-festival, for 10,000, not more . . . We made a deal to book the PA; we paid three thousand there and then, four thousand on the day . . . There were scaffolders from Donegal who put up the stage. Red and Roger booked the bands. Tom Robinson, Steel Pulse. Tom Robinson got X-Ray Spex.

The question of which band would headline the proposed Carnival was far from straightforward. RAR wanted the Clash to perform. The band's manager Bernie Rhodes was willing to agree, so long as his band had top billing. The RAR tradition was, however, that the final, most prominent, slot should usually be reserved for a black band. According to Chris Salewicz, biographer of the Clash's singer Joe Strummer, the band agreed with their manager. Strummer, in particular, was desperate to headline the Carnival. His own brother was a former NF member who had killed himself several years before and by taking top billing the singer could atone for this past: 'In Strummer's mind, he would be head-lining the whole event, righteously opposing the National Front – the personification of positive punk'.[20]

Jerry Fitzpatrick was present in the negotiations. Neither RAR or ANL was willing to concede. But neither were Rhodes or his band:

> Two weeks before the carnival, we started trying to book the Clash. I went to a meeting with their manager Bernie Rhodes, then one with the band . . . I remember Mick Jones flicking ash in my hair. Finally Joe Strummer spoke and said, 'Fuck it, we'll show them!' That was just two weeks beforehand.

Such tensions were kept out of public view, with RAR's advocates focusing on the politics behind the Carnival. *Melody Maker* interviewed Syd Shelton. 'We try and use popular culture which we all enjoy to mobilise people . . . getting them to take a stand against the Front.' Shelton insisted that RAR's audience was not the already convinced but working-class kids: 'There are no jobs for them, they're living in cities and estates that are closing down . . . Conditions are right for the Front.'[21]

Coverage in the music press predicted that maybe as many as 20,000 people would join the Carnival, with anti-fascist journalist Martin Walker telling the readers of *The Guardian* that the event would be neither a march nor a concert but a 'walking musical carnival'.[22] A rather more effective piece of publicity came from Nicky Horne at Capital Radio, who told his audience the night before to get down to Victoria Park. 'But arrive early,' he continued, 'a lot of marchers will be turning up.'

The day began with a march to Victoria Park, starting at Trafalgar Square and going via the Strand, Fleet Street, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green Road and Old Ford Road. According to Dave Widgery, 'At 2 a.m. a group of RAR stalwarts . . . began to hear crowds chanting through the downpour. And by 6 a.m. the following morning there were already 10,000 people in Trafalgar Square.'[23]

The organisers avoided placing the Carnival in London's Hyde Park, the traditional destination of left-wing protests, choosing instead Victoria Park, midway between central Hackney and London's East End. The march came close to Brick Lane, scene of repeated clashes between left and right. The area also had a resonance with the anti-fascism of the 1930s, going back to the 1936 Battle of Cable Street. Indeed the Carnival coincided with the republication of Phil Piratin's classic account of Cable Street, *Our Flag Stays Red*.[24] The Front's John Tyndall had already announced that at the next election he would contest South Hackney, a constituency that included the park. On the day, left-wing Labour MP Ian Mikardo explained why Victoria Park had been chosen: 'In the East End, fascists have done their traditional work of dividing one group of workers from another group of workers. There are too many people in the labour movement who believe if you leave it, it will go away.'

David Rosenberg travelled from Leeds: 'The first [Carnival] was brilliant but the most exciting bit was the march to Victoria Park where we were reclaiming the streets of the East End, which had been swamped by fascists.'

Chris Nicholas was gigging in the evenings as a guitarist for punk band the Need. Coming from an Anglo-Burmese family, 'I believed that every black person I met was my comrade'. But the East London was off limits: 'If there was any other occasion, I wouldn't dare go to Bethnal Green, there was just too much danger.'

Rock Against Racism produced a special issue of *Temporary Hoarding*. Inside was a poster of Steel Pulse, Poly Styrene and Tom Robinson with anti-Front quotes, including one from Mick Jones of the Clash: 'I'm half Jewish so I suppose the NF will try to send half of me back to Lithuania.' Another article asked:

> How did race hate happen? . . . When vote KKKatcher Thatcher makes speeches about the 'threat' of alien culture; when Labour MPs sign a parliamentary report which recommends identity cards for all black citizens; when a Ku Klux Klan gang leader can shoot his mouth off on TV – race hatred becomes respectable. Don't let's be fooled. Race hate divides us when we most need to stand together – against the real enemy.[25]

Dave Widgery's article for the Carnival special edition of *Temporary Hoarding* was directed at the MPs and the press. Its message was upbeat:

> How many of them have ever lived in the inner cities they are always deploring? If they did they might find that deplorable human beings are getting along with each other much better than reported. That Jamaicans like Guinness, Greeks listen to reggae, the Irish go to tandoor restaurants, we all eat doner kebabs and smoke as much dope as we can get our alien hands on. That people like the mix and clash of cultures, want to be citizens of the world not 8 the Railway Cuttings. They might even realise that the 'the black problem' is really the white problem and get to the root of that one . . . You don't change reality's pain by submitting to it. We've stopped waiting for the Good Samaritan and crossed the road ourselves. In fact, it's pathetic that it's taken the Front to bring us together. Tens of thousands of unknown unfamous people have worn a badge or won an argument or moved a resolution or put on a gig. Roots, radicals, rockers, reggae: We came together today. Let's stay together.[26]

At Trafalgar Square, there were giant papier-mâché models of John Tyndall and Adolf Hitler built by Peter Fluck and Roger Law, the caricaturists who would later make *Spitting Image*, while the Tower Hamlets Arts Project provided clowns, stilt-walkers and street theatre. There were dozens of banners, ranging from old-style union signs that took four people to carry, to home-made spray-painted sheets: 'Karen, Kate, Anna and Jill Against Racism, Fascism, Sexism'. There was a steel band and thousands of people carried the Anti-Nazi League's distinctive yellow lollipop placards. 'They were so different from the usual placards you would see on demos,' remembers Geoff Brown from Manchester. 'At the first carnival we were giving lollipops away; by July you could sell them.' Alongside the ANL lollipops were many more conventional *Socialist Worker* placards, blocks of text in Helvetica, against a background of green and purple swirls: 'Stop the Nazis, No Immigration Controls'.[27]

The march was due to depart at 1 p.m. but long before then Trafalgar Square was full, the sun was out and the marchers set off without waiting for the organisers' approval. Mike Barton was given the job of carrying the puppet heads of Tyndall and Hitler to the front of the demonstration: 'We had to run through the crowd.'

Einde O'Callaghan was planning to meet friends on the Strand:

> When we got there, it seemed that tens of thousands of other people had also arranged to meet at the same corner. Eventually enough of us found each other and we unfurled our banner along with the thousands of other banners . . . We looked like a bunch of hippie desperadoes, to be quite honest – how could we wear such dreadful clothes? It was a glorious day and despite the long walk to Victoria Park I wouldn't have missed it, one of the most enjoyable demonstrations I ever attended and the music was great, too.

According to the report in the next Monday's *Guardian*, 'Police spokesmen said they were "astonished" at the size of the event. The tail of the march had still not left Trafalgar Square as the front reached journey's end at Victoria Park.'[28]

Syd Shelton paused as the march proceeded along Cambridge Heath Road. He knew that a local tobacconist Mrs Grier had been part of the crowds against Mosley, forty years before: 'She stood outside her shop on Cambridge Heath Road for three hours. I saw her the next day and she said it made her incredibly proud.'[29]

In Victoria Park, the organisers were willing the crowd to arrive. To enable communication with the contingent leaving Trafalgar Square, the organisers had had the idea of hiring radio telephones. But on the day they were useless. Kate Webb recalls standing at the back of the stage and swearing to herself: 'Nobody's coming'.

The least known of the acts was Patrik Fitzgerald, a punk-poet who had built up a following playing in smaller venues. Seemingly nervous as he came on, he brought an acoustic guitar and was soon being heckled by the crowd: 'I went down terribly. There were the skins down the front throwing darts at bands. They didn't like me.'[30] According to Billy Bragg, a 20-year-old member of the audience who was just in the process of forming his own band, Riff Raff, 'I remember thinking, "You fucking idiot. All that solo-songwriter stuff is dumb." If [Fitzgerald] had come out with a Telecaster and cranked it out he would have gone down a storm.' Another member of the audience, Chris Nicholas, recalls hearing Fitzgerald say, as he left the stage, 'If you hate the Nazis as much as you hate me, they've got no chance.'

X-Ray Spex took the stage at 1.30 p.m., with singer Poly Styrene dressed in a tweed twinset, a black Margaret Thatcher, the effect subverted by an African headscarf and lurid coloured socks. Now, at last, the park was full.

Red Saunders compered. He had grown enormous sideburns and wore a cap covered in badges with a 'Mr Oligarchy' cape (based on a character from a recent Kartoon Klowns show) and a RAR t-shirt. In photographs of the event, he looks like nothing so much as a left-wing John Belushi:[31]

> The first carnival took place just a day or two after my daughter was born and I was horrified that my beloved Nina wouldn't be able to make it. The equality of the sexes, wasn't that what we were supposed to believe in? Laurie Flynn, to his credit, made sure that all that day, whenever Nina wanted anything or needed anything, there was always someone from the SWP on hand . . .
>
> I saw the first coaches arrive and disembarking these dusty-eyed punks. Where are you from, mate? Liverpool. It would be big, then, I knew! We had 10,000 whistles we gave out free, thanks to Tom Robinson. We had the papier-mâché models of Tyndall and Webster – we stuck them by the lions at the bottom end of Trafalgar Square. The weather was lifting. By the time people were sitting off, it had lifted.
>
> At Victoria Park, we had the stage. It was very amateur compared to the ones you see these days – put up by a whole bunch of comrades working through the evening . . . You could see big Rastas chatting to very straight St John's ambulance men, all sorts of dialogues. The park began to fill up. I ran on and the first thing I shouted was 'This isn't Woodstock. It's the Rock Against Racism carnival!' and there was this huge cheer.

Steel Pulse played their song 'Ku Klux Klan' complete with white Klan hoods.

'This one's for anyone who's come down to London today,' Joe Strummer shouted, leading the Clash into 'London's Burning'. The crowd began to ebb and flow and such was the pressure of the numbers against the stage that it seemed at any moment the scaffolding might give way.

When their time was up, the Clash refused to leave. 'I was at my wit's end,' Tom Robinson recalls. 'It was my favourite band stealing my set.'[32] The power was pulled out before the Clash's Johnny Green fixed it back in. After the main Clash set, Jimmy Pursey came onto the stage, joining the band in singing 'White Riot'.

Chris Nicholas remembers the excitement of seeing X-Ray Spex, the Clash and above all, Tom Robinson: 'Anyone who got up and was brave enough to sing "Glad to be Gay", he was one of us. He was great, people loved it.'

The bands returned for a last song, "We Have Got to Get It Together".

The Carnival was the lead story on that evening's ten o'clock news.[33]

Richard Atkinson was 'flabbergasted' by the size of the event: 'We expected 10 or 20,000 people, which would have been excellent, a big rise in the numbers who came on the marches and the demos. But, on the day, there were tens of thousands of people there.' John Shemeld was 'utterly amazed at how big it was'.

Tony Benn, one of the two Labour MPs to speak, described the Carnival in his diary:

> There was a lorry with a steel band playing and there were tens of thousands of young people. The average age was about twenty to twenty-five and there were banners and badges and punk rockers, just a tremendous gathering of people.[34]

According to Rock Against Racism's Sharon Spike:

> What was amazing was all the different people enjoying it; skinheads, punks, teds, Rastas, some old hippies, Greasers, disco-kids and loads of middle-aged people and all. There were quite a few dogs. There was such a big turn-out that people at the back felt it hard to hear what the bands on stage were singing. But it didn't matter too much because it was all so interesting just to walk around. It is very hard to describe what it felt like. Not Love and Peace and all that rubbish. It was more than music. Feeling all together. Not being scared of one another. Making you feel strong in a good way.[35]

Photographs of the crowd at the Carnival show that it had a mixed audience. The people there had their arms raised, clapping the bands or in single or double clenched-fist salutes. Perhaps the most striking single demographic was the youth of the crowd, with very few faces older than their mid-twenties. Hair was scruffy, mid-length. If punk means suspenders and thick eyeliner and messages scribbled by hand on someone's shirt then this was not a punk crowd but an audience of Grange Hill fans.[36]

The report in *Socialist Worker* was little short of ecstatic:

> At dawn on Sunday in Victoria Park, the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism put the final touches to all their hard work. A young park-keeper watching the stage and tents and stalls going up said, 'We're expecting five thousand but we're ready for ten.' And more came. Fifty thousand stretched from Trafalgar Square to Hackney. The kids had joined the march . . . Eighty thousand thronged the park, celebrating the rise against the fascists. 'We're black, we're white, we're dynamite,' they sang. They stood in the sun together. Eighty thousand. No trouble. Magic. The next day the National Front held a walk through London's East End. Nearly two hundred attended. It was secret. It rained all the way. Even God has joined the Anti-Nazi League.[37]

The historian Raphael Samuel describes Victoria Park as 'the most working-class demonstration I have been on and one of the very few of my adult lifetime to have sensibly changed the climate of public opinion'.[38]

John Stockwood, a teacher, had been arrested at Lewisham and sentenced to three months in jail. There he heard reports of the Carnival:

> As the news came through of the numbers assembling in Victoria Park, our wildest expectations were exceeded. Ten thousand, then twenty, then thirty, then forty thousand. Earlier one of the fascist screws had jeered through the cell door, 'Where's your nigger friends now then, Johnny?' Now he was quiet. The other cons on the wing didn't support my ideas

> but they knew that something was happening against the system that crippled their lives. Radios were our contact with the real world. Everyone was listening and with every new announcement they cheered. As the final numbers came through, we were told that 100,000 people, black and white, had marched from Trafalgar Square to east London. All the cons on my wing, many of them racist, cheered and banged on the pipes. It's a memory I will take to my grave.[39]

Whose Carnival?

The decision to call the event a 'Carnival' raises questions about the relationship between black and white in both RAR and the Anti-Nazi League. As the Black Marxist magazine *Race Today* pointed out, Carnival is a Caribbean tradition:

> The Carnival festival is peculiarly Trinidadian, held annually on the Monday and Tuesday immediately preceding Lent . . . On the two days, small groups and individuals would disguise themselves and parade through the streets, mimicking their masters. The symbols of the event were the Calypsonian, the radical poet whose words would provide the event with its radical edge and the steel band that accompanied them.[40]

In England, the word is associated with the Notting Hill Carnival that had been founded in London by the black American Communist Claudia Jones.[41] In using the name, was the anti-fascist campaign replicating the ways in which white society has learned from black people, stealing their ideas and taming them?

The Carnival was criticised from various sides. The first set of critics came from the British left, several of whose smaller groups responded to the campaign with a proprietorial indignity: how dare the League or Rock Against Racism launch a campaign when it could have been them? This critique could perhaps be ignored were it not for the tendency of later historians to repeat these sources in their own works.[42] The criticism from the nano-left was, in any event, more than capably answered at the time by such writers as Ian Walker of the Labour left *Leveller* magazine:

> 'No politics at Carnival' was the puke-making headline in *Newsline*, daily organ of the Workers' Revolutionary Party. Where were they looking for the politics? If they didn't see it in any of the bands or the 80,000 people, they could have tried looking in one of the dustbins where leaflets distributed by the Workers' Socialist League were there for takers. This leaflet denounced the Anti-Nazi League, denounced Peter Hain (who's he anyway?) and denounced the petty bourgeois reformism which had diseased the enterprise. The WSL issued a call for 'workers' defence squads' to replace the ANL. To be organised by who? The massed ranks of the WSL? Wakey, wakey.

Walker's article explains why punks loved the Carnival. They were in charge. 'Victoria Park,' it was titled, 'What did you do there? We got high. We touched the sky.'[43]

A second source of critique came from individuals who were early enthusiasts for the anti-fascist campaign but, as the Front went into decline, chose to move away from it. In 1976 or 1977, they accepted that the Front was indeed (as it saw itself) the 'spearhead' of a broader right-wing attack. Where the Front was, black people suffered. Even by the time of the Carnival, this was no longer as clear. The Front was concentrating on elections. Meanwhile, an increasing number of activists were taking up campaigns to protect families from deportation, mobilising against police attacks and so on. There were a whole generation of anti-racists who went from an 'anti-fascist' perspective to an 'anti-racist' one as the 1970s wore on.[44]

The third and most important source of critique was a number of black-led campaigns. In the mid- to late-1970s, Tariq Mehmood was a member of IS in Bradford. He describes being invited to address a meeting on the politics of racism, a subject he knew from day-to-day experience, but which he lacked the vocabulary to explain:

> I must have been one of the few non-whites in Bradford in the organisation . . . I just had no idea how to articulate what racism was, I knew how to fight it because I didn't have a choice, I couldn't articulate the theoretical concepts.[45]

In Mehmood's autobiographical novel, *Hand on the Sun*, the gap between black and white socialists is expressed in the figure of Hussain who joins IS. Over time, Hussain finds their discussions patronising. Hussain realises that he identifies more with his Asian friends than with the white left. Hussain's frustrations are brought out in friendship with another youngster, Jalib, who has none of his political contacts but responds more easily to events:

> Whenever Hussain talked to people, he always talked about politics and about struggles that were taking place in various parts of the world. He felt that Jalib, unlike himself, did not gloss over the reality of black people's lives with empty phrases.

In the novel, a breakaway group is established for Asian socialists, 'Somage', and Hussain joins that instead.[46]

This incident is hardly fictional. There was a split from IS. The new group published a paper, *Samaj*, later *Samaj in' a Babylon*. Other papers formed by Black activists who left majority-white socialist groups included *Black Struggle* and *Mukti*. A Black Socialist Alliance briefly brought these groups together.[47]

In a short story collection, *East End at Your Feet*, written by Farrukh Dhondy of the Race Today Collective, the same theme of failed solidarity informs the

story 'KBW', narrated by a teenage boy whose friend Tahir Habib is repeatedly confronted by racists. KBW stands for Keep Britain White, the graffiti daubed on Tahir's parents' front door. At the book's conclusion, a gang of twenty white youths attack the Habibs' home. The narrator's father, a white radical, has always promised the Habibs his support but in the moment of their need he refuses to help, with his wife shouting, 'Why don't you help him? What kind of bloody Communist are you?'[48]

The most sustained criticism of the Anti-Nazi League can be found in Paul Gilroy's book, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. Gilroy argues that the Anti-Nazi League was a retreat from the earlier politics of Rock Against Racism. For Gilroy, the 1976 or 1977-era incarnation of RAR was a transgressive space which took the radical ideas of reggae and taught them to white punks, who responded by mocking the Union Jack and royalty. Rock Against Racism was, in his account, rare and precious and of unique value: 'Something like a radical populism that was tied to and perhaps, for a moment, even captured the unruly, demotic momentum of opposition.'[49]

The ANL, Gilroy argues, was different from RAR. It was happy to compromise with nationalism. In labelling the Front as 'Nazis', it portrayed them as foreigners, suggesting that racism could be defeated by drawing on Britain's imperial history:

> The ANL deliberately sought to summon and manipulate a form of nationalism and patriotism as part of its broad anti-fascist drive . . . This may have led to the electoral defeat of the NF, British Movement and their allies [but the League's victory] was achieved ironically by reviving the very elements of nationalism and xenophobia which had seen Britannia through the darkest hours of the Second World War.[50]

While Gilroy writes that the ANL relied on the mythology of the benign Second-World-War 'Britain's darkest hour', such language is hard to find anywhere in the Anti-Nazi League's publications. League materials did call the Front 'Britain's new Nazis' and reproduced images of the 1930s, such as German soldiers carrying out the Holocaust, but the references in League material to the heroes of the Second World War, the positive descriptions of 'Britannia', are not there. The League did use Nazi Germany as a negative example of why fascism should be fought, invoking the memory of the Holocaust as the result of untrammelled fascism, but the League's publications did not maintain that the alternative was a return to Britain's wartime spirit.

Even among local ANL leaflets, which were written in different areas by members of the Labour Party, the Communist Party,[51] or the SWP, and would reflect the politics of their author, you do not find this language. Far more common is the sort of argument that you find in, for example, ANL leaflets in Hornsey, warning readers about institutional racism, the history of slavery and the exploitation by Britain of her Empire. 'The reason', the NF can grow, the authors wrote, 'is because it is a racist party and we live in a society where racism is firmly entrenched'.[52] The language was often earnest or pedestrian, but it was hostile to institutional racism.

Of course, a message does not need to be explicit for it to be felt. Some of what Gilroy is describing is not the formal content of leaflets, but the subtle rearrangements that took place in early 1978 as RAR joined up with the ANL: the choice of speakers, the emphasis on certain campaigning priorities over others.

A recurring trait of 1970s anti-fascism was its insistence on reproducing photographs of John Tyndall from the early 1960s. For Gilroy, this is clear evidence of the League falling into the trap of opposing benign British patriotism to the foreign Nazism of the Front: 'Pictures of the NF leaders wearing Nazi uniforms was produced as the final proof that their Britishness was in doubt.'[53]

A different assessment of this manoeuvre emerges, however, if you focus on the tactics' success or otherwise among its target: the right. Numerous Front sources point to the morale-sapping consequence of their public association with fascism. Previous chapters have given examples of National Front supporters who were ashamed of the accusation of Nazism: John Bean suffering nightmares in memory of the prank he had played in belittling the Holocaust, articles in *Spearhead* in 1974 complaining about the libellous reproduction of Tyndall in uniform, Front defectors who in 1977 gave Tyndall's photograph as their reason for leaving.

By 1978, the factions within the National Front were again at war and one theme of the conflict was the vulnerability of Tyndall to accusations of Nazism. Critics of the leadership blamed 'Martin Webster and John Tyndall [and] their antics . . . in the days before they joined the National Front'. In principle, Martin Webster or John Tyndall should have sued for libel, except that

> In their case it turns out that some of what the media prints is literally true – they did play the fool in the days when they should have been taking their British nationalist politics seriously – and neither they, nor anyone else for that matter, can sue anyone or any institution if what is said or written is literally true . . . A smear is only useful if it can be made to stick and unfortunately for the Party smears can be made to stick to Martin Webster and John Tyndall.[54]

It is possible to imagine a far-right party whose members and voters are proud and loyal fascists (say, the Italian fascists in the early 1920s). To tell members of such a group 'But you are all fascists' would be a pointless tactic. Of course we are, they would answer, that's what we call ourselves. It is also possible to conceive of a far-right party whose members all see themselves as anti-fascist (think a pub of EDL members in the late 2000s singing about blowing up German bombers). To say to the supporters of such an organisation 'But you are all fascists' would be equally silly. The allegation would seem baseless to them and they would laugh it off. The Front was in neither of these positions. Its members were neither secure in their fascism, nor were they beyond it. They behaved as if their fascism was a source of ongoing shame to them. It was their incomplete disavowal of fascism which rendered them vulnerable to their opponent's accusations that they were simply a party of Nazis.

In other words, it was not the sham patriotism of seeing Tyndall in uniform which disturbed the Front, it was the allegation of fascism – an ideology which many NF supporters wanted to junk without having anything coherent to offer in its place.

Indeed, there was a dual purpose to the accusation that the Front were 'Nazis', an allegation aimed as much at onlooking voters as it was at the Front themselves. Dennis Potter's television play, *Brimstone and Treacle* (1978), employs a similar method albeit in a different, literary, form. A suburban family, Mr and Mrs Bates, are visited by a stranger, Martin, who claims to have known their daughter. The husband Tom Bates (played by Denholm Elliott) dwells longingly on the England he used to know, the England he remembers as a younger man. Bates objects to the ubiquity of drugs, pornography and admits to having recently joined the Front. Martin responds by suggesting, almost innocently, that blacks should be placed in special camps. Mrs Bates answers, 'like Butlins'. Martin agrees before continuing:

> Millions. Rounded up from their stinking slums and overcrowded ghettos. Driven into big holding camps, men, women, piccaninnies . . . You'll see England like it used to be again, clean and white. They won't want to go . . . They'll fight, so we shall have to shoot them and CS gas them and smash down their doors . . . Think of all the hate we'll feel when they start killing us back. Think of all the violence! Think of the de-gra-dat-ion and in the end, in the end, the riots and the shooting and the black corpses . . . .

Bates begs Martin to stop, promising to leave the Front. Uncomfortable, confronted by the racist end-point, he is compelled to rethink what he believes.[55] Not in literature but in life, this is how the League's message was intended to work.

Gilroy's key criticism is of omission. For a RAR activist in 1976 or 1977, he suggests, the social movement was a campaign not just against the Front but against racism in its totality. By the time of the 1978 Carnival, he argues, RAR functioned as the musical wing of the Anti-Nazi League. The ANL was in this account a movement of the old, of Communists, of trade union general secretaries, of those who looked back with nostalgia on 1939–1945. It was a campaign also of the SWP which, while younger than these other parties, was, Gilroy insists, no less bureaucratic and no more capable of a lasting commitment to anti-racism.[56] Given the ANL's sharp focus on fascism, by allying with it, was RAR giving up its hostility to state racism?

Younger activists tended to be more forgiving. Gurinder Chadha had been born in Nairobi and had come with her family to Britain only to encounter the racial hostility directed at Kenyan Asians. A decade later, she had just turned age 18 at the time of the first Carnival and when she had told her parents she wanted to attend, they warned that it would be attacked by the Front. She pretended that she was going shopping in central London. Arriving at Victoria Park, she saw the Clash doing their sound check but no crowds, nothing. Convinced that the event had been a flop, she was preparing to leave when from outside the park came a strange, high-pitched buzz, getting successively louder. Finding an old box to stand on, she saw

> [h]undreds and hundreds of people marching, side by side in a display of exuberance, defiance and most important victory . . . marching, chanting to help me and my family find our place in our adopted homeland . . . I had found my tribe, my kindred clan.[57]

John Siblon was also an Asian teenager, living with his family in a white area in Eltham. Through the 1970s, John recalls, he was routinely attacked at school, called names and beaten. The growth of the Front encouraged an atmosphere of hatred: 'The day after one of their broadcasts, I decided to bicycle to school. Even then I could hear them calling me names.' Siblon describes hearing about Lewisham on the news: 'It was the first time we heard of people fighting back.' He later became an active supporter of both the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism: 'I didn't understand it all at the time but we needed something and something happened.'

There were other activists beside Paul Gilroy who believed that something precious was being lost. Dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson is another long-time supporter of RAR who began to disengage from the campaign in 1978. In interviews since then, he has complained that 'sections of the white left in this country were trying to exploit the conditions that blacks found themselves in and trying to win us over to their various ideological positions. They saw us as victims.'[58]

RAR's Dave Widgery welcomed Gilroy's critique. After the first Carnival and in a letter to the journal *Radical America*, he too warned that anti-fascism could not be a substitute for anti-racism:

> Racism in Britain is much more widespread than the present fascist base and represents a species of thwarted working class reformism. To tackle this physical blockade of the organised fascists is necessary but insufficient and can consume far too much of the revolutionary left's still small resources.'[59]

Ten years later, on reading Gilroy's book, he insisted that his fellow activist had been correct to point out 'The obvious limitations of a campaign against the growth of the National Front rather than racism as a whole'.[60]

Storming sexism

Three weeks after the Carnival, RAR supporters organised a concert at Brighton Polytechnic ending with a set by the Fabulous Poodles, who were later to play in the US and even open for the Ramones. The Poodles opened with their song 'Convent Girls', about a grown man driving his car to follow underage girls: 'You look so cute in your short white socks. I follow you for blocks and blocks . . . The shadow in my mirror screams, am I too old to hold these dreams?' A minority of the audience responded with visible dismay, heckling the band, speaking to the organisers to ask them to make the band stop, trying to pull out the band's equipment

or knock over their microphone. Rather than respond sympathetically to their critics, the band followed it with another similar number, 'Tit Photographer's Blues', whose chorus went, 'I got the Tit, Tit, Tit Photographer's Blues'. Challenged by the women in the audience, the Poodles responded, 'You're too narrow, baby.' 'They called us Killjoys, Mary Whitehouses,' recalls Heather de Lyon, one of the band's principal critics and a drummer for local anti-racist, anti-sexist punk band Devil's Dykes.

In the forty years since, the song 'Tit Photographer's Blues' has not aged well. No doubt intended to be satirical, it portrays the relationship between photographer and subject from the perspective of the photographer. The cameraman suffers 'the blues', in that he photographs women and is aroused by them only to suffer humiliation in that they refuse to sleep with him. But the situation is seen from his perspective, not theirs; it is a commercial relationship with nothing unusual about it.

Seven of the women who were at the Brighton Poly concert decided to take the matter up with RAR in London and wrote a letter to complaining about having been patronised:

> It would have been great if our complaints that night had been heard and people had been curious to discover what were our objections. But it seemed that politics are not appropriate for Saturday nights . . . What we learnt is that a concert cannot be a 'political' concert just by hanging a banner over the stage.[61]

The members of the Rock Against Racism committee were not at the Brighton gig, so all that the likes of Saunders, Webb, or Widgery had to go on was the audience's response to the band. There must have been voices within the collective urging caution. Even Heather de Lyon and the other authors of the letter of complaint acknowledged that the songs had been meant as a joke.[62] But the editors of Temporary Hoarding insisted on publishing the letter of complaint, together with an apology:

> We hope that all the bands who do gigs for RAR will take note of this letter. RAR is very sorry that the Fabulous Poodles' set was so offensive to women it is not enough to make a stand against one form of repression – the exploitation of blacks – if they are going to contribute to another – the degradation of women.[63]

In isolation, the apology comes over as superficial. What is much more impressive is the extent, after this gig, that Rock Against Racism took on board the criticisms the women in the audience had made and set out to change its relationship with its bands. RAR drafted a performer's contract.[64] It insisted that bands were expected to be make known their anti-racism, e.g. by wearing RAR badges. In addition:

> Although we are called Rock Against Racism we support liberation from other forms of oppression (e.g. sexism, anti-Semitism, fascism, Irish oppression,[[65]] etc). We neither expect nor tolerate any group which supports such oppression during gigs. If they do, we reserve the right to stop groups from playing.

Lucy Whitman (Lucy Toothpaste), a writer for *Temporary Hoarding* and a member of the magazine's editorial committee, helped to set up a RAR sister-organisation, Rock Against Sexism and a new fanzine for RAS, *Drastic Measures*. The main article of *Drastic Measures 1* was titled, 'Love sex, hate sexism':

> Women in music are under constant pressure from the record companies to flaunt their bodies, both in performance and in adverts, in order to sell more records. If they succumb – and after all they have got a living to earn – hypocritical rags like the *NME* who think it's hip to pay lip-service to feminism, while making sure there's a neat snap of Debbie Harry in every edition, accuse them of exploiting their sexuality.[66]

In an article entitled 'Sex vs fascism', published in *Temporary Hoarding* 7, Lucy Toothpaste drew on the work of Wilhelm Reich, the radical anti-fascist psychologist, and argued that his diagnosis of authoritarian misogyny could be applied equally well to contemporary Britain::

> In case all that lot seems a bit far-fetched to you, we couldn't resist giving you some living proof of the connection between authoritarianism in the home and in the state. 'Love and discipline went together. My father sometimes took his pit belt off and leathered me. I shed tears but I knew he was right and I was wrong.' That's what James Anderton said in an interview in the *Observer* in February. It was a belief that right and wrong were as distinct as black and white that reinforced his one and only ambition 'to be a policeman and if possible the biggest policeman of all'.

By the end of the 1970s, Anderton's goal had been achieved, as Lucy Toothpaste insisted: 'Well, he grew up to be a policeman alright, the chief constable of Greater Manchester to be exact, the second most powerful cop in the country.'[67]

Among its supporters, Rock Against Sexism soon counted Carol Grimes, the Mekons, Gang of Four, Crass, Tom Robinson, Pam Nestor, Oxy and the Morons, Spurts, Tronics, Jam Today, the Raincoats and the Resisters. RAS groups were established in Edinburgh, south east London and York. A typical *Drastic Measures* centre-page spread showed photographs of men in official uniforms (morning dress, business suits and bowler hats). Against a photograph of a chief constable was the message, 'Deliciously sexy uniform with seductive side-slits in pure dark cotton ravishingly adorned with glittering silver sequins. Matching overcoat and belt tying in front. Prices start from £230. Also available in pink.'[68]

Over the following weeks and months, Rock Against Racism supported Rock Against Sexism. At RAR conferences, a portion of the time was devoted to publicising RAS.[69] A number of local Rock Against Racism groups booked RAS events, the south east London RAR group becoming a Rock Against Sexism collective. Red Saunders leant his studio to RAS to make banners. Dave Widgery attended RAS events. When Rock Against Sexism needed security, they went to RAR for support.

Nazi funk

While RAR was having to deal with these issues, one sign of the success of the anti-fascist campaign was the coverage increasingly given to it in the Front's press. *Bulldog*, the Front's youth paper, explained to its readers that 'The reason why the communists hate anyone who loves Britain, including the National Front, is simply because they are essentially NOT British.' Another article in the same magazine reported that, 'a mere 500 degenerates' attended a Rock Against Racism carnival in Harwich. The organisers of the event claimed four times as many. Whichever figure was right, it was still the biggest political event the town had ever seen.[70]

In 1977 and 1978, the NF attempted to make recruits at the F-Club in Leeds, where one young fascist Eddy Morrison produced his own fanzine, *Punk Front* and NF supporters attacked gigs by the Mekons and Gang of Four.[71] Morrison wrote to *Sounds*: 'What really should be organised is a Rock for Racism concert, with all-white bands, all-white music'.[72] The fascists found it easier to disrupt left-wing events than organise meetings of their own. Paul Furness was the main organiser for Leeds Rock Against Racism:

> My parents' house had a KKK slogan painted outside (we know where you live of course) and a Young Communist Party . . . meeting was savagely attacked. I had to take off my badges and alter my bus routes into town to avoid where Nazis lived but still managed to get beaten up by them.[73]

In his memoirs, Joe Pearce, the founder of Young National Front, concedes a surprising degree of admiration for the anti-fascist campaign:

> Rock Against Racism was a huge success. In early 1978, an estimated 100,000 people marched the six miles from Trafalgar Square to Victoria Park in London's East End in an event jointly organised by Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League. Many of the biggest punk bands played in the free festival which followed. In an act of defiant opposition, I was among a group of Young National Front activists who heckled the march as it wended its way past the Bladebone [*sic*] pub . . . Nonetheless, the huge size of this anti-racist demonstration illustrated the power of rock music to lure tens of thousands of youngsters to active participation in the political struggle.[74]

In April 1978, Pearce watched the procession to the Victoria Park Carnival from the Blade Bone pub at 185 Bethnal Green Road, where he and his friends, looking rather less than cheerful, were spotted by Dave Widgery:

> There were a few Fronters with their mates, the sort of beer-gut and Page Three brigade who have an I love virgins sticker in the back of their off-brown resprayed Rover saloon and two kids whom they hit. They had come for a good laugh at the do-gooders. Three hours and 100,000 demonstrators later, the smiles were well and truly wiped off their faces.[75]

Despite such setbacks, Pearce was not yet ready to admit defeat. Pearce's brother Stevo was a young punk on the fringes of the music scene and later a significant manager and promoter who played an important part in the early history of bands including Soft Cell, The The and Depeche Mode. Pearce attempted to copy him, and indeed RAR, by setting up Rock Against Communism (RAC), to 'fight back against the left-wingers and anti-British traitors in the music press'.[76] Over the following months, Pearce recruited around half a dozen racist bands, including Damaged, White Boss, Phase One, Beyond the Implod and the Raw Boys.

Carnival two

The first Rock Against Racism carnival was followed by local events in many areas. Five thousand attended the next in Cardiff, 8,000 took part in an event in Edinburgh[77] and 5,000 went to RAR's Southampton carnival. It was also in the aftermath of the first Carnival that the Communist Party finally gave its official support to the Anti-Nazi League, hushing in retrospect its criticism of the Socialist Workers Party's militant tactics at Lewisham.[78] The largest Carnival outside London saw Manchester's 35,000-strong event in July 1978.

Half a dozen flatbed trucks led off an anti-fascist march from the middle of Manchester to Hulme and Moss Side. The Mekons and the Gang of Four played. Some 15,000 people were on the march with another 25,000 joining once the Carnival began, to hear Steel Pulse, China Street and a newly revitalised Buzzcocks. The *New Manchester Review* ran interviews with local activists and with reggae band Steel Pulse: 'The umbrella of the Anti-Nazi League thus embraces an almost unheard of cross-section; from the Church to the Communist Party, trade unions to the Tories, an alliance that is heart-warming in its camaraderie.'[79]

'After the Carnival,' John Walker remembers, 'things were much easier. Some of the NF's periphery went to the Carnival. We could see them talking to people, dancing. After the summer of 1978 they were not a threat.' Geoff Brown agrees, 'At the Carnival, there were kids from every single school in Manchester. These kids would then go back into the school and say, "Where were you?" to the local Nazi.'

The May 1978 local elections were a considerable setback for the National Front, which secured disappointing votes in areas of previous strength, including

Bradford and east London. Christopher Husbands notes that in the 1978 London Borough council elections, the Front fell sharply compared to the party's success in the same areas a year before. The Front continued to obtain relatively high votes in its heartlands; however, these had narrowed to a relatively small area of Hackney South and Tower Hamlets: in Wenlock, De Beauvoir, Moorfields, Haggerston, St Peters and St James wards, the Front vote scraped above 15 per cent.[80]

The NF responded to its setback with violence. On 4 May 1978, the night of the elections, a 25-year-old machinist, Altab Ali, was murdered on his way back from his work on Brick Lane to his home in Wapping. He was crossing Whitechapel Road when he was attacked by a group of racists who stabbed him in his chest with a knife. On 14 May 1978, around 7,000 young Bengalis took part in a protest carrying Ali's coffin from Brick Lane to Downing Street. Placards asked, 'How many more racial attacks? Why are the police covering up?'

The huge marches following the murder of Altab Ali did not receive any coverage in the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph*, or *The Express*. *The Times* gave the protests thirty-five words on page 4, the *Financial Times* just thirty-one words.

Askan, one of the march organisers, was interviewed by Dave Widgery:

> These racial attacks, they are getting worse all the time. Worse since National Front on the scene. Worse still since Mrs Thatcher. We're not getting co-operation with the police. Mr Callaghan and his colleagues, do they realise what is happening all the time to our people?

Thatcher's 'alien culture' speech was a recent memory. 'Single-handedly,' Widgery wrote, 'she had recuperated overt racism into the Parliamentary tradition.'[81]

Working as a doctor in the area, Widgery observed countless examples of petty racism – an elderly Asian porter sacked for looking ill, a Bangladeshi woman sectioned in the seventh month of pregnancy, a white trade unionist driven to insomnia by window bashing, after he defended his Asian neighbour. For Widgery, the death of Altab Ali threw 'into harsh relief the general level of racial violence in the East End, the indifference of the police and the prejudices of the non-Asians'.[82]

The attacks, Widgery maintained, had been planned by the Front: 'For the fascist tacticians active in the area – older men steeled and schooled in the street fighting of the Mosley revival – it became part of a calculated plan whose aim was to force the Asians to retaliate blindly.'[83] By tacticians, Widgery no doubt had in mind the likes of Derek Day senior, who was recorded in the Sex Pistols film, *The Filth and the Fury*, pointing his finger at his chest and at the Hoxton tower block where he lived: 'Yes, I am a racist and why? Who's made me a racist? This government, the Conservatives and every standing, stinking councillor.' As Day delivers his tirade, two black women in their late twenties can be seen leaving the same block, walking in a completely natural and ordinary way around the bigot.

Ken Leech was the Anglican priest for Brick Lane. 'Between 1976–8,' he writes:

> there was a marked increase in racist graffiti, particularly NF symbols, all over Tower Hamlets and in the presence both of NF 'heavies' and clusters of alienated young people at key fascist locations, especially in Bethnal Green. There were several murders, many incidents of violence against person and property and on 11 June 1978 a mob of several hundred skinheads rampaged through Brick Lane, attacking the hones of the Bengali community.

Led by Derek Day junior, the son of the Front leader, the mob attacked a 55-year-old man Abdul Monan and knocked him unconscious. Later, Monan was taken to hospital where he required five stitches to his face. The police were slow to arrive. They made numerous arrests but charged just three of the white youths, all with the most minor of public order offences.[84]

On 18 June, 4,000 people joined an ANL solidarity march through the East End. The following weekend, however, the Front were back. Over the remainder of the summer, there were repeated large anti-fascist mobilisations, several of which were harassed by police officers led by Chief Superintendent Wallis, who boasted that Brick Lane was 'the most heavily policed area in Britain'.[85]

While, in racist myth, the 'Asians' were a vulnerable presence in Britain and an easier target than African or Caribbean youth; the Bengali community had been toughened by several years of struggles. Over the previous few years, Tower Hamlets had witnessed an extraordinary campaign during which several hundred Bengali families had squatted vacant homes. Squats were set up in Matlock Street, Varden Street, Walden Street and Old Montague Street, in Jubilee Street, Adelina Grove, Lindley Street, Redmans Road, White Horse Road, Aston Street, Flamborough, Westport and for a time Arbour Square.[86] Homes were connected to gas, water and electricity. The council meanwhile was determined to force the families out, cutting off electricity supplies. Eventually, an amnesty would be declared,[87] but not until after Tower Hamlets Council had gone public with widely criticised plans to create a Bengali-only ghetto in the Spitalfields district.

Sybil Cock had recently moved to east London:

> There was a body of knowledge about housing – how to get the electricity on, how to pay rates to give yourself legitimacy. How to 'open' a squat. Many of the buildings we lived in had belonged to Jewish families and people were being moved out as they got too old to cope with the lack of bathrooms etc. Often an elderly couple would hand their keys to their flat to a known 'sensible' squatters' leader so that families could just move in after they moved out to Essex or an old people's home . . . The former tenants thought the buildings would be warmer and safer if they were inhabited rather than boarded up.

Tassaduq Ahmed, an educational worker in the East End, commented on the growing self-organisation among young Bengalis living around Brick Lane:

> The bare facts of assaults and killing of Asians in the East End by the National Front's bully boys are known; what is not being sufficiently stressed is the strong multi-racial response that these acts have evoked, in particular among the Bengali youth, who have joined enthusiastically with their white friends in combating a menace which in its ultimate form will spell the death knell of a democratic Britain.[88]

On 15 July 1978, the Indian Workers Association, the Standing Conference of Pakistani Organisations and the Federation of Bangladeshi Organisations issued a call for the setting-up of Asian self-defence groups. The campaigns also invited all their members to join the ANL; it was a huge compliment to that campaign.

On 17 July, some 8,000 workers in factories and restaurants and at Ford Dagenham struck against the racist murders in the East End. Many schools also witnessed walkouts by their students. The strikes and their supporters then marched along Bethnal Green Road. Sybil Cock was among them: 'There was a sit down outside Bethnal Green cop shop when a few of us were arrested. Several hundred or more people refused to move until the prisoners were released.'

'The impact of the anti-racist strike', Alok Biswas wrote, 'has a special meaning for the Bengali people who live in East London's Spitalfields . . . What I saw this weekend was a whole community expressing itself against injustice.'[89]

The strike was widely supported in the East End with groups such as the Gay Activists Alliance, then based in a squat on Redmans Road, also calling on east London gays and lesbians to join the pickets.[90]

On 18 July, records Stan Taylor, 'Bengali youth took control of Brick Lane and refused to allow anyone apart from IS/SWP and ANL representatives into the area.' Six weeks later, after a further mobilisation sponsored by the ANL, the Bengali Youth Movement Against Racism and IWA, the Front appeared to concede defeat, promising to relocate its main London presence to Islington's Chapel Market.[91]

The same day, there was a RAR Carnival in Cardiff and a large anti-fascist presence at the Durham Miners' Gala. Jim Nichol made it up from London to Durham for the service but was late and sat at the back of Durham Cathedral, a silent observer. Every year the service follows a set ritual; when the services finishes, the miners collect their banners and raise them aloft and their own brass bands strike up. At first, Nichol thought the event was proceeding exactly the same as it did every year but then he looked more closely: 'As they turned to go down the aisle of the Cathedral, a majority of the miners were wearing Miners Against the Nazis stickers. I'm getting pins and needles even now as I remember it.'

A second national Rock Against Racism carnival took place in Brockwell Park on 24 September 1978, with Sham 69 intended to headline. A march set off from Hyde Park. Numerous bands, including Crisis, Charge, Eclipse, Inganda, RAS, the Derelicts, the Enchanters, the Members, the Ruts and the Straights, played from floats along the route. Photographs from the stage show a larger audience even than the

first carnival, with the organisers claiming that 150,000 people attended. According to Joe Garman, chair of the North Manchester Campaign Against Racism:

> The 'Queen' waved to us, all dressed up as she sat on the throne perched on the top of a bay window. There were lots of kids, some in pushchairs, some perched on dad's shoulders. There was a Notts collier in pit clothes, his enemy was the National Front even tho' his 'blackness' washed off.

At the end of the march from Hyde Park to Brockwell Park, Garman described his aching feet – 'yet another reason for hating the Nazis'.[92]

Colin Fancy took part and recalls a huge banner hung outside Brixton station, 'Brixton Gays Welcome the Carnival Against the Nazis'. The workers in the Ritzy cinema had changed the letters on their display to give a similar message of support.

Red Saunders was the compere again, in a 'more thought-out' uniform: 'Yellow boiler suit covered in RAR stencilled slogans with a huge stove pipe hat with the Love Music, Hate Racism slogan all over it. Plus shades, of course.'

The proposed headliners Sham 69 had been put off by a series of death threats and it was Belfast punks Stiff Little Fingers who opened. Bernie Wilcox was standing by a RAR stall when he found a backstage pass that had been left unattended. He sneaked backstage and saw Elvis Costello playing Nick Lowe's song, 'What's So Funny about Peace, Love and Understanding?'. Lowe was himself working at the Carnival as Costello's producer and watched the performance, tears in his eyes.

Mark Steel attended the Carnival with a friend, Jim. It was their first demonstration and 'neither of us had any idea what would happen when we got there. What is a march, we pondered?' They soon found out:

> All the scenes which would become so laboriously familiar, the hordes of leaflets thrust at you from all angles, the flamboyant but awful drumming costumes, the chanter screaming into a megaphone and becoming increasingly, thankfully hoarse, it all seemed so thrilling. And there was Aswad and Tom Robinson and Elvis Costello and instead of feeling angry I felt jubilant because now I was *doing* something.[93]

Geoff Brown of Manchester Anti-Nazi League felt a similar sense of elation. At the time of the first Carnival, he recalls, it was not clear whether the National Front would be defeated but 'the second was a victory march'.

Sham declined to play, but the band's frontman Jimmy Pursey took to the stage, telling the audience that

> All this week you've probably read a lot of things about me and Sham 69. We've been dictated to. Last night I wasn't going to come. Then this little kid said to me, 'You're not doing it because your fans are NF.' They said I ain't got no bottle. But I'm here. Nobody's going to tell me what I should or should not do. I'm here because I support Rock Against Racism.[94]

For many of those who took part, this second Carnival was every bit as exciting as the first, a view not discouraged by the press, with ANL-supporter Keith Waterhouse telling the *Daily Mirror*:

> What the Anti-Nazi League is, it seems to me, a manifestation of the new social class I once identified as the Polyocracy. It transcends all the old boundaries of accent, upbringing or postal district, laughs at the supposed difference between one shade of skin and another . . . If it is all a Trot conspiracy, tough luck on the conventional political parties who play it all so safe and down the middle that they have the popular appeal of yesterday's gravy.[95]

Yet the success of events in Brockwell Park was partly clouded by an attempt by the Front to regain the initiative after weeks of being outnumbered. Hearing the date of the Carnival, the Front called a London-wide mobilisation on the same day at Brick Lane. The Tower Hamlets Defence Committee warned that with anti-fascists in south London, the population of Brick Lane was in danger. 'Far fewer attacks have taken place in Brick Lane over the last few months,' the Committee explained, 'which the local people attribute not to the increased police presence but to the active defence which is being carried out by black people and anti-racists.'[96]

In the build-up to the Carnival, any number of anti-fascists warned the ANL leadership of the need to make sure that the NF was prevented from marching. 'For weeks before,' another SWP member Andy Strouthous recalls, 'lots of us were trying to make sure that Brick Lane was covered. The ANL wanted to keep an eye on just one thing, the carnival. They didn't think we could spare people but we could.'

Throughout the day, Paul Holborow was repeatedly asked about Brick Lane. Before the march to Brockwell Park had even set off, at the Hyde Park assembly point, he gave a speech urging the crowd not to worry about east London. Speaking with his usual confidence, he assured his listeners that the Anti-Nazis had sent supporters to protect Brick Lane and the area was safe. There was no Front presence there and, if there had been one, it had been smashed. Ian Birchall recalls Holborow descending the platform, having made his speech and then quietly asking another of his SWP comrades if they could drive to Brick Lane and find out what was really happening.

At Brockwell Park, the same questions kept on being asked: was Brick Lane safe? It is possible to imagine the relief of the likes of Saunders or Widgery at mid-afternoon, with the Carnival at its height, when Ernie Roberts of the engineers union took to the platform to break the news that yes the Front was at Brick Lane. But so too were anti-fascists in their tens of thousands, they had driven the NF away, and the streets were safe. Roberts concluded: 'The NF's feeble attempt to disrupt the carnival and invade Brick Lane is completely defeated.'[97] The audience cheered.

It would have been a fantastic speech, had any of it been true. Indeed, while it would be tempting to criticise Roberts for misleading the crowd, he was very much 'decoration' at the head of an alliance which others controlled. No one would expect Roberts to have an independent source of information. He was relying on what others in the League told him, that is, its full-time leadership.

Two hundred and fifty Front supporters had been able to assemble in the East End. According to Steve Tilzley:

> The National Front marched practically unopposed through the East End and held a rally in Curtain Road, off Great Eastern Street. There had been a small, token anti-racist presence in the area to protest against their presence but they were heavily outnumbered by the Nazis and the police.[98]

Mike Luft, a veteran anti-fascist from Preston, was at Brick Lane and remembers 'the sectarian left' criticising the League, while themselves 'refusing to actually organise physically against the very young NF kids'.

Martin Lux recalls an apathetic crowd of anti-fascists in east London: 'I could well understand the local youth defending their area against any Nazi incursion but the rest of us were confused, lacked the initiative to take the offensive.' Fifty or so anti-fascists did break out of police lines but were too few to achieve anything.[99]

David Landau's memories are Pythonesque:

> There had been demos before along Brick Lane and lots of people came out when the NF were leafleting there. But this time it was much smaller. What I remember . . . was bizarre. The RCP [Revolutionary Communist Party] were out in force. But in all, the left was outnumbered roughly two to one. What I remember is the RCP starting a chant of 'Police protect the Nazis'. Generally, that's my analysis. But this time, the police were protecting us.

The League leadership did eventually instruct a group of several hundred people (i.e. SWP members) to leave the Carnival and make sure that Brick Lane was kept NF-free. But the decision was delayed and the group sent late, arriving in east London only at around 6 p.m., long after the National Front had dispersed.

Tariq Mehmood was now a member of the Asian Youth Movement. At Brick Lane, he joined up with local youth only to find them outnumbered. He feels bitter about the way in which the left let down the residents of Brick Lane: 'Really, the Carnival should have been diverted as a historic gesture and wiped out the fascists but the SWP didn't seem to work like that . . . [They] did a terrible disservice to the struggle against racism.'[100]

To this day, there are those who insist that no mistakes were made. One of them is Jerry Fitzpatrick of the SWP and the ANL, who maintains that the League's leadership were right to focus on the Carnival to the exclusion of everything else. He has no regrets either about Ernie Roberts's speech or Brick Lane's isolation:

> [T]he success of the march depended on us going through Brixton. That was more important than any stunt the NF pulled. Even if we had sent more numbers to Brick Lane, it couldn't have been enough. The police always had it covered. The Front were contained. We were always going to be contained, which is in fact what happened. We had to keep our eyes on the prize.

Dave Widgery was rather less willing to accept that anti-fascists should have left the defence of Brick Lane to the police. In his account:

> The transport logistics were not worked out and the anti-fascists who did attempt to block off the Front in Brick Lane were demoralised and easily pushed about by the belligerent police pressure. The Front were harassed but not stopped and by the time reinforcements had arrived by Victoria line from Brixton, the National Front had dispersed.[101]

Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council characterised the failure to protect Brick Lane as a significant defeat:

> There has been a massive campaign to get the National Front out of their warehouse headquarters in Great Eastern Street, Shoreditch . . . [East End activists] were openly and bitterly critical of the ANL for their failure to divert sufficient help from the Carnival to block the NF march.[102]

Richard Pole was one of those sent to Brick Lane. It took him hours from Brixton and by the time he arrived it was too late. 'I remember quite a lot of bitterness being addressed to people who had been at the carnival . . . Yes, we did mess up.'

After the Carnival, *Socialist Worker* published an apology. Unfortunately, the paper failed to state clearly what had been done wrong. The paper in fact repeated the deceit, claiming that '2,000 anti-racists . . . held Brick Lane throughout the day – an extremely arduous and frustrating task'.[103] This was a perfectly good description of the steps the ANL should have taken, but not what they had actually done.

Notes

1 D. Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot 'n' Race 'n' Rock and Roll* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), p. 80; B. Case, 'Angels with dirty faces', *New Musical Express*, 11 March 1978.

2 The Ilford demonstration had been banned under the Public Order Act: J. Dickinson, 'NF march banned', *Evening News*, 22 February 1978. The Front proceeded regardless, were confronted by anti-fascists and thirty arrests were made: I. Mather, R. Lustig and K. O'Lone, 'Police arrests in Ilford clashes', *Observer*, 25 February 1978.

3 G. Marshall, *Spirit of '69 A Skinhead Bible* (Dunoon: S.T. Publishing, 1994), pp. 73–79; 'High tension', *Socialist Worker*, 11 March 1978; R. Huddle and R. Saunders (eds), *Reminiscences of RAR* (London: Redwords, 2016), p. 89.

4 D. Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge* (London: Picador, 2016), pp. 52–53.

5 A. Ogg, *No More Heroes: A Complete History of UK Punk from 1976 to 1980* (London: Cherry Red Books, 2006), p. 512.
6 S. Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978–1984* (London: Faber, 2004), p. 124.
7 R. Sabin, 'I won't let that dago go by: rethinking punk and racism', in R. Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 199–291, 207. Perry's ally Danny Baker writes in his memoir, 'You certainly won't find any politics in *Sniffin' Glue* nor nine out of ten punk records', D. Baker, *Going to Sea in a Sieve* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012), p. 139.
8 Crass's 1979 album *Stations of the Crass* included the song 'White Punks on Hope': 'All their RAR bands and their protest walk / Thousands of white men standing in a park / Objecting to racism's like a candle in the dark'.
9 *New Musical Express*, 19 August 1978.
10 Interviewed by Lucy Toothpaste before the formation of Magazine, Pete Shelley opined, 'The organised left is organised. It's doctrinaire. Everybody's a text-book lefty, it just gets rather boring. I'd rather people made up their own minds about things': 'Buzzcocks', *JOLT* 3 (August 1977).
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51 While you might have expected the decision of the CP to join the ANL in spring 1978 to have nudged the campaign in a left patriotic direction, there is at least some evidence of the same process operating in reverse, with the CP's Young Communist League in particular starting to tail the visual and linguistic style of RAR and the ANL. See, for example, the YCL leaflet, 'Unite Against Racism', undated but probably 1978, with its warnings that 'NF would ban punk, reggae, soul and rock' and 'NF would bring back the 11-plus, the birch, heavy discipline in schools'.
52 Hornsey ANL, undated leaflet, 'Racism in Britain'.
53 Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp. 156–157, 170–177, 172.
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57 R. Huddle and R. Saunders (eds), *Reminiscences of RAR* (London: Redwords, 2016), p. 45.
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59 D. Widgery, 'Letter from Britain', *Radical America* 12 (5) (1978), pp. 75–77.
60 D. Widgery, '*Beating Time* – a reply to Ian Birchall', *International Socialism* 2 (35) (1987).
61 'Against sexism – not sex', *Temporary Hoarding* 6 (summer 1978).
62 Many leftist men saw no problem with the songs. Four months later, in October that year, the Poodles recorded a session for John Peel's Radio One show. His introduction

placed the song within a tradition of sexual conquest: 'One has always heard colourful stories about convent girls and I have in the past found some of these to be based on fact.' After playing the song, his next words were a Humbert Humbert-esque joke, 'Would you like a lolly, my dear? That's a song written with me in mind': J. Cavanagh, *Good Night and Good Riddance: How Thirty Five Years of John Peel Helped to Shape Modern Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), p. 240.

63 'Bloody furious', *Temporary Hoarding*, March–April 1978; also *Spare Rib*, April 1981, and 'Rock Against Sexism', *Temporary Hoarding* 9.

64 Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down*, p. 90.

65 The RAR band who best conveyed the overlap between anti-black and anti-Irish racism were Stiff Little Fingers from Belfast, whose song 'White Noise', goes step by step through the racist nonsense told about black people, Asians, before concluding with a blistering 'Paddy is a moron. Spud thick Mick . . . Green wogs. Green wogs. Ain't no Brit'.

66 'Love sex, hate sexism', *Drastic Measures* 1 (no date). The title against Heather de Lyon and other's letter to RAR: 'Brighton against sexism – not sex'.

67 L. Toothpaste, 'Sex vs. fascism', cited in Women and Fascism Study Group, *Breeders for Race* (London: WARF, 1978), pp. 21–22.

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69 For example, at the Rock Against Racism Dub Conference on 9–10 December 1978, a session was dedicated to what was initially termed 'RAR Against Sexism', Agenda, December 1978.

70 'Why the Communists hate the National Front', *Bulldog* 7 (May 1978); 'The carnival is over', *Bulldog* 10 (November 1978); also A. Birtley, 'How to infiltrate – and learn from – the left', *Spearhead* 123 (November 1978), p. 13; National Front, *Lifting the Lid Off the 'Anti-Nazi League'*.

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83 Widgery, *Beating Time*, p. 27.

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8

SOUTHALL

Through the autumn and winter of 1978–1979, conflicts continued between the left and right. Anna Sullivan recalls weekly battles at Chapel Market in Islington, the Front's main London paper sale after Brick Lane.: 'It got very bad . . . You'd see seven or eight Union Jacks on a great spike flag, a hundred fascists at a time.' Anti-fascists 'produced leaflets every week, on a Gestetner machine . . . We leafleted every estate. We knocked on every door. The clashes at the market were just at the end of that work.'

Within Rock Against Racism, a conscious decision was taken that there would be no more mass Carnivals and the campaign would refocus on its local groups and smaller local events. Widgery explained the move to the *NME*:

> We don't want to get locked into the alternative Harvey Goldsmith syndrome. Part of the reason we've separated from the ANL a bit is that we don't want to go on producing bigger and bigger outdoor festivals. Some of us went through that all in the late '60s. Instead we made a very conscious decision to try and build up RAR clubs as local get togethers away from the whole superstar and super-profit thing.[1]

Anti-fascism in Liverpool meant protests, pickets outside NF-identified pubs, writers' workshops and Rock Against Racism gigs. The largest of these was held in autumn 1978 in Walton Hall Park. According to a local paper *Black Links*:

> Walton residents and a few Tory councillors tried to ban the concert (are they racists or do they just hate to see the kids enjoy themselves?), fearing that we would wreck the park, terrorise the old ladies and frighten the cats; their complaints, however, wilted in the warm September sun as 5,000 people listened peacefully to eight groups rock against racism . . . People came to hear the

> music but also to declare their rejection of racism. There were speeches from Merseyside Anti-Racist Alliance, ANL and RAR and plenty of leafleting. Nobody is saying that all the white kids came because they were convinced anti-racists or that they were suddenly converted to anti-racism as a result of the concert. But at least they listened, they wanted to be counted.[2]

It was also at this time that the squad tactic, once limited to London, began to spread to the North West. In autumn, the National Front established a whites-only football team, the Lilywhites and entered the team into the Hyde and District Sunday League. Tameside Campaign Against Racism and Fascism approached the local league council and County FA only to be told repeatedly that no action would be taken against the team.[3] On 8 October 1978, anti-fascists called a further protest, to which some five hundred people came. Members of the anti-fascist squad attacked the Front's van, smashing its windscreens and turning the vehicle over.[4]

At the Front's Annual General Meeting in January 1979, Chairman John Tyndall declared that the Front was in a war with 'red mobs'. According to Joe Pearce of Young NF, still an enthusiast for Tyndall's leadership, 'Violence seemed to be woven into the very fabric of life for active members of the NF.'[5]

In spring 1979, *National Front News* was also forced to report a series of bombings against left-wing targets, including an SWP bus driver and a milkman in High Wycombe, the Communist Party headquarters in King Street, the offices of the local government trade union NUPE and Housman's bookshop. The author of the article claimed that the victims had planted the bombs themselves, in order to secure a ban on the NF before the pending election[6] – a story which the groups maintained despite the trial in the following month of the Front's Alan Birtley for stockpiling ingredients to manufacture explosives.[7] 'Labour created the Anti-Nazi League', the NF claimed, 'for the sole purpose of destroying the National Front.'[8]

In Leicester, on 21 April 1979, an estimated 2,000 anti-fascists mobilised to oppose a smaller group of National Front supporters. The police re-routed the shaken Front demonstrators out of Leicester and then fought with the remaining anti-fascist crowd. The news showed police dogs chasing anti-fascists onto the Leicester University campus. Eighty-two people were arrested, including Balwinder Rana from Southall in west London, who was stopped by four plainclothes officers and bundled into an unmarked car while on his way home. For Mike Luft, Leicester was a victory 'even more clearly than Lewisham'. However another demonstrator, David Rosenberg, was less optimistic: 'The police were completely out of control and I remember discussing that someone was going to be killed soon.'[9]

The kids are innocent

Southall, the focus of the next major protest, had a largely Asian population. Just under half of the local population had parents born in the Commonwealth or

had been born there themselves. The Front had few supporters in Southall or anywhere in the borough of Ealing. As at Lewisham, their intervention was all about forcing their way into an area from the outside. The events began in spring 1979, when the Conservative council agreed to let the town hall to the Front to hold an election meeting. One local supporter of the ANL, Balwinder Rana, remembers reading about the Front meeting in the *Ealing Gazette*: 'People felt very angry and insulted.'[10]

The area had a large and diverse left. The best-respected anti-racist organisation was the Indian Workers' Association. The IWA's Southall leadership was provided by Vishnu Sharma, who was close to the Communist Party, and his deputy, Labour councillor Piara Khabra. Rock Against Racism's local ally was Peoples Unite, a predominantly Caribbean group with its headquarters at 6 Park View. The International Marxist Group also had members in Southall and the IMG's Tariq Ali was a Socialist Unity candidate for Southall in the May 1979 general election.[11]

The news that the Front was planning to hold a meeting in Southall reached Vishnu Sharma, the IWA's president, on 7 April 1979. An emergency meeting of the IWA's local executive voted to petition the council to rescind its decision to allow the Front to use its hall. The IWA determined to hold a march from Southall to Ealing Town Hall on the Sunday before the meeting, where a petition was to be presented in support of the IWA campaign. Businesses in the area were asked to close from 1 p.m. on 23 April, the day of the meeting.

On 11 April, a further public meeting took place in Southall, called by the IWA and with community groups, the engineers', teachers' and hospital workers' unions and socialist groups attending. Two police officers asked to address the meeting, but a vote was taken to exclude them. Piara Khabra argued that the best tactic would be to call a stay-away. The focus should be on a demonstration before the Front's meeting. Vishnu Sharma disagreed and called for confrontation. Other speakers suggested that the Front should be met with what its members termed a 'wall of silence'. Over the course of the meeting, a consensus emerged that as well as the activities already proposed by the IWA, on the 23rd there should also be peaceful sit-down protest at 5 p.m. on the roads leading to Southall Town Hall. A coordinating committee was elected, with Vishnu Sharma as its convenor and community groups and the left represented.

On Sunday, 22 April, the day before the election meeting, 5,000 people marched to Ealing Town Hall to hand in a mass petition calling for the National Front meeting to be cancelled. This was a huge demonstration, with all sections of the population represented, including older women in long white dresses and Sikh men in turbans and beards. But even this march did not pass without disagreements with the police. Rana recalls attempts to negotiate with the officer in charge:

> I asked him why there were so many police and horses. He said that they were for our protection. He had information that the Front might attack us. I said there's five thousand of us here, there's no way the NF are going to try anything. But he wouldn't take them away.

In an atmosphere of mistrust, trouble was always likely to break out:

> One young demonstrator was playing around. He flipped a copper's hat off as a joke. But rather than taking it as a joke, they arrested him and dragged him away. I stopped the march, we all sat down in the middle of Southall, outside the police station and I went in to talk to the chief superintendent. They wouldn't let him go. So I said, 'If you don't let him go, I can't be responsible for what happens.' They threatened to arrest me and I said, 'Go on then', and within five minutes, they'd let him go.

On Monday, 23 April, police coaches were parked on each side of the town centre and officers on horses could be seen patrolling the streets. The IWA established a headquarters in central Southall. Supporters of the ANL set up a first aid centre at 6 Park View Road, the headquarters of Peoples Unite, which counted among its supporters Clarence Baker, the manager of reggae band Misty in Roots.

The afternoon shutdown of local shops proved even more successful than the organisers had hoped. Not only was central Southall closed on the day of the Front meeting, but so were a series of local factories with mixed or majority-white workforces: Ford Langley, Sunblest bakery, Wall's and Quaker Oats. Some of these were owners' shut-downs, while others were full or partial strikes by the workers.

Even with the shops closed, such were the police numbers that central Southall was under outside control as several thousand officers restricted civilian access to streets around the town hall. Cordons were set up on each side of the building.

A rumour went round, warning that the police were planning to get around the sit-in by smuggling NF members into the town hall before the meeting was due to start. Members of the Southall Youth Movement (SYM) began to assemble outside Southall Town Hall from shortly after noon. Balraj Purewal of the SYM led a march of some thirty to forty people along South Road to the town centre. According to one participant interviewed by the BBC:

> This is our future, right? Our leaders will do nothing . . . our leaders wanted a peaceful sit down but what can you do with a peaceful sit down here? We had to do something, the young people. We don't want a situation like the East End where our brothers and sisters are being attacked every day.[12]

Passers-by joined along the way, so that on reaching the town hall the SYM contingent swelled to around two hundred people. Many of their members were arrested there.

By 3.30 p.m., the entire town centre was closed and the police declared Southall a 'sterile' area, which was now free of anti-fascists. A hard rain was now falling, further dampening the protesters' mood. Rana tried to raise morale, speaking on platforms, doing his best to keep anti-fascists together. There should be no repeat of the situation in mid-afternoon, when the SYM had been cut off from the other anti-fascists. Protesters were still anxious to block the town hall. Police officers,

meanwhile, were refusing to negotiate with anybody. The diversity of Sunday's protest was not reflected in Monday's crowd. The older men had not appeared. There were fewer women and older people. Rumours of a fight were keeping many anti-fascists at home.

The organisers had planned the protests to begin at 5 p.m. and to take the form of sit-downs occupying each of the surrounding streets. Through the course of the evening, large contingents of people came together, outside the police cordons. The SWP's Pete Alexander conveys the geography of the protest:

> At the centre of Southall there's a crossroads: one road going to the west (Broadway), one to the north (Lady Margaret Road), one to the east (Uxbridge Road) and one to the south (South Road). The town hall, where the meeting took place, is on the corner between the north and east streets . . . After the Southall Youth Movement's abortive march, the cops took control of the crossroads and the whole area between it and eastwards beyond the police station. [There were] armoured cars, cavalry, the ordinary riot cops in large numbers and helicopters. The Indian Workers' Association and others blocked the South Road; we – the Anti-Nazi League and others – blocked the Uxbridge Road. Blair Peach and others worked their way around to the Broadway.

The group along the Broadway found themselves caught between two police cordons: one just beside the Town Hall and a second further to the west. Peter Baker was one of several hundred protesters caught between the lines:

> At about 7.30 p.m. the good humour of the crowd was shattered . . . a roar went through the crowd, emanating from the rear. People turned and looked westwards down the street. I saw, to my amazement, a coach being driven fast straight into the back of the crowd. It was a private coach, an ordinary 30–40 seat char-a-banc. At a cautious estimate, I would put the speed of it at 15 m.p.h., which is murderous when it is being driven into a crowd.[13]

The coach was carrying police officers and some twenty members of the National Front towards the town hall. Joe Pearce, was among them: 'On the scheduled day, I was shuttled to Southall town hall, the location for the meeting, with a large police escort. As I gave my speech I could hear a riot outside.'[14] Other police vehicles followed the first coach and demonstrators failed to block them. Once the Front were inside the town hall, the police sought to stretch their lines wide and force anti-fascists further and further away from the meeting. Individuals ran into the park or sheltered in homes. According to a later National Council of Civil Liberties report, 'Every time people tried to push through the police lines, mounted police on horse-back laid into the demonstrators, beating them to the ground and arresting some of them.'[15]

According to Rana, 'The police used horses. They drove vans into the crowd, and fast, to push us back. They used snatch squads. People rushed back with whatever they could pick up.' Some people threw bricks at the police lines. Others ran into the park or sheltered in homes or in the Peoples Unite building.

The police could see how that building was being used and determined to clear the anti-fascists out. Officers entered the building, occupied it and gave instructions to the people sheltering there to leave. They occupied the hall and the stairs and beat people as they tried to escape. Tariq Ali of the International Marxist Group was in the building, bleeding from his head. A solicitor, John Witzenfeld, was also inside:

> They kicked in the panel on the door to the medical unit and waving their truncheons told us to get out. I was pushed into the hall with the others behind me. Suddenly I felt a blow to the back of my head and I managed to half-turn and saw a hand holding a truncheon disappearing downwards . . . Whilst we were waiting for the ambulance, two police stood in the doorway with their backs to us whilst people were brought down from upstairs and I saw truncheons rise and fall and I heard shouts and screams from the women.[16]

Annie Nehmad was the doctor in the first aid room. She described being at 6 Park View Road and working with an ambulance worker to treat the wounded, including one man, Narvinder Singh, who had a 3-inch wound in his right hand following a police attack. As the police came closer, she saw people running in the street outside and closed the windows and the door. The police demanded to be allowed in. Attempts were made to keep the door closed before the police succeeded in kicking the door in. She and a nurse, Richard Bunning, were forced from the room. The hallway was as busy as a tube train in rush hour and two officers were using their batons on protesters. Nehmad herself, although identified as a doctor, was struck on the back of her head. So heavy were the blows that she stumbled and had to be rescued by other demonstrators. Somehow making her way back to the first aid room, she found Bunning only to see that he too had been struck. Bunning was crying, later fell unconscious and for a time his body was worryingly cold.[17]

To this day, Nehmad holds that this level of violence could not have taken place without having been authorised by a senior officer:

> Police in general are told to try to avoid hitting on the head, as any blow to the head is potentially fatal. The reason is not only the blow itself but the after-effects of it, which include bleeding into or around the brain, which may not be detected until it is too late. On 23 April, not only were heavier than normal truncheons used but police throughout the demo used these heavy truncheons to hit people on the head. Someone somewhere must have said this was OK. Someone somewhere was prepared to see people killed on a demo in Britain.

Officers with batons smashed medical equipment, a sound system, printing and medical equipment. According to Jack Dromey, an official of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) and a veteran of Grunwick, 'I have never seen such unrestrained violence against demonstrators . . . The Special Patrol Group were just running wild.'[18] His view is echoed by Dialo Sandu, who was spat at by a police officer as she watched the riot unfold from her front garden: 'It's the first time I would ever speak against the police. But I saw what happened with my own eyes.'[19]

Clarence Baker, the pacifist manager of Misty in Roots, was among those hit on the head by a police baton. He was so badly hurt that he fell into a coma.

After the storming of Peoples Unite, Balwinder Rana was forced to escape by jumping over a garage and hiding from a street full of police horses. Anti-fascists had collected the numbers of all the phone boxes in central Southall and had thought that they would be able to keep in contact. But the police occupied the town centre, including the boxes. Angered and disorientated, the protesters attempted to regroup.

Perminder Dhillon was in a small crowd of anti-fascists hiding in a restaurant. The people demanded that the owner switch on that evening's news:

> Their wounds still bleeding, people saw the Commissioner of Police, the Home Secretary and other 'experts' on the black community condemning the people of Southall for their unprovoked attack on the police! As usual, only pictures of injured policemen were shown – nothing of the pregnant women being attacked and the countless other police assaults.[20]

Blair Peach

Also caught up in the events at Southall on 23 April was Blair Peach, a 33-year-old schoolteacher from New Zealand. Derek Melser, who knew Peach in Wellington and then in London, recalls Peach as a young man who stammered in 'a variety of explosive repetitions, facial tremors and contortions, sudden rushes of words, gasps, sighs, extended vowels, bodily jerks'. He had 'a certain cheerful hopelessness and a lack of social ambition or pretension coupled with a wryness and sometimes bitterness, born of struggle'. Peach wrote poems and edited a poetry magazine, *Argot*, for which he approached an older New Zealand poet, Louis Johnson, who later recalled 'the slight youth – Jewish perhaps – / a dark tousle of hair and owl-size spectacles / who came to my house in the early sixties / for poems for his student magazine'.[21]

Peach emigrated to London, after which he taught at the Phoenix School for (in the contemporary term) 'delicate' children. He was still working there at the time of the Southall protests. Peach was by all accounts an inspirational teacher who immersed himself in the lives of his pupils, visiting them at home and providing reading classes in the evenings and school holidays.

Peach was a consistent anti-racist. Meetings of his NUT association ended with a drink at the nearby Railway Tavern in Grove Road, Bow. One evening, the teachers were told that the publican refused to serve black customers. Challenged by them, the landlord said that blacks were 'pimps, queers and prostitutes'. The teachers left the pub and toured round other nearby pubs, finding supporters. Returning to the pub, they picketed it and spoke to the publican again. He called the police, who arrested Peach, who was taken by the police to be the ringleader of the crowd.[22] Peach was arrested and charged with threatening behaviour but acquitted. Twice in 1978–1979 he was attacked by supporters of the National Front as he cycled home from teaching at the Phoenix School and suffered black eyes, bruising and cuts.

On 23 April 1979, Blair Peach travelled to Southall by car with various friends – Jo Lang, Amanda Leon, Martin Gerald[23] and Françoise Ichard. Arriving in Southall at about 4.45 p.m., they made their way to the Broadway and remained there until 7.30 p.m., when the police coach forced a way through demonstrators' lines and escorted members of the National Front into their meeting.

After the bus had passed, the police removed the furthest cordon on the Broadway and made repeated efforts to clear the area. Some protesters tried to escape by heading south into Beechcroft Avenue. But the road was no safe haven. It turned at its southern end onto another road, Orchard Avenue, taking demonstrators onto Uxbridge Road, back towards the town hall and the worst of the fighting.

At around 7:45 p.m., Peach, Leon, Gerald, Laing and Ichard decided to leave the Broadway. They turned left (south) into Beechcroft Avenue, which was not blocked by the police. Peach and Leon, who had agreed to stick together, were behind the others. Leon later told the inquest that she heard police sirens and saw a row of police officers with truncheons ready. She saw a police officer hit Peach from behind.[24]

Another witness, Ms Atwal saw the attack on Blair Peach. On her account, Peach was walking around the corner from Beechcroft Avenue into Orchard Avenue, when a police officer with a shield in his left hand and a truncheon in his right hand hit him. She then saw Peach sit down, when a police constable came over to him.

Peach was now sitting against a wall, where that officer Constable Scottow (on his account) took him to be hiding from the police. Scottow neither asked Peach if he was well nor called an ambulance but shouted at him to move on.[25]

Blair Peach was taken into 71 Orchard Avenue by members of the Atwal family. They let Peach lie on their sofa and gave him water. An ambulance was called at 8.12 p.m. On arrival at hospital, Peach was transferred into intensive care, where he was found to have swelling on the outer membrane covering his brain. He died at 12.10 a.m. on 24 April. The cause of his death was a fractured skull.

The justice campaign

In the aftermath of 23 April, the courts were arrogant in their use of power:

> A 14-year-old Sikh boy appeared before a magistrate at Ealing juvenile court. He had been charged with 'threatening behaviour' and being in possession of 'offensive weapons' at 6.20 p.m. on 23 April 1979 . . . The defence produced several witnesses. These included a white doctor, a white solicitor and a white ambulance man. They all testified that the boy, at the time, was being treated for a hand wound and had suffered a severe loss of blood . . . But defence witnesses, even respectable ones, are not permitted to obstruct 'the due process of law'. The boy was found guilty and fined £100. The defence argued that he had no job and no source of income. The Magistrate replied, 'Let him find a job.' The defence retorted that it was a criminal act for a 14-year-old to gain employment. But the Magistrate had meant a 'paper round' or something like that. The boy . . . will be paying 75p a week for the next two years.[26]

The *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Telegraph* all made the events at Southall their front-page lead. The headlines were 'Battle of Hate. Election Riot: Police Hurt, 300 Arrested', 'Race Rioters Battle With Police Army', '300 Held In Riot At NF Demo' and '300 Arrested At Poll Riot'. One edition of the *Daily Mail* went furthest in confusing the racists and the anti-racists, proclaiming, 'Race Rioters Battle With Police Army'. The papers depicted anti-racists as violent thugs.

Local papers were, if anything, even worse. The *Hereford Evening News* was critical of Southall residents: 'However understandable the resentment of the large Asian community in the west London suburb where the National Front chose to stage a deliberately provocative election meeting, there can be neither excuse nor forgiveness of their violent attacks on the police.' According to the *Oxford Mail*, 'Because this is a free country, where even detestable organisations have to be allowed to hold election meetings to support their candidates, a big force of police was present. The organisers of the demonstration caricatured this as police repression.' The *Swindon Evening Advertiser* claimed that 'The Anti-Nazi League, which was originally sponsored, in part, by a number of respectable people who did not stop to think twice, has now degenerated into an umbrella for extreme left malcontents.' The *Nottingham Evening Post* bemoaned the fact that 'If the extreme political nut-cases want to behave as they have done, in this country of free-speech, there is little we can do to stop them, short of banning them completely.'[27]

A number of papers called for bans against the far left. According to the *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, 'the real consensus in Britain is to get the rabble of both Right and Left off the streets'. The *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* asked, 'What price the Anti-Nazi League when the people it persuades to demonstrate use Nazi methods?'

The *Oxford Mail* termed anti-Nazi protesters 'enemies of democracy'. Finally, the *Lancashire Evening Post* developed this phrase, suggesting that while the political right were irresponsible, the left were more dangerous: 'In the short term they are more dangerous than the National Front because they hide their revolutionary and totalitarian aims behind a noble cause.'[28]

Mark Steel was caught up in events at Southall. Back home afterwards, he experienced a complex of emotions, ranging from shock at the news of Blair Peach's death, to remorse that he had been excited by the clashes with the police and guilt that he had escaped when someone else had died. What angered him most was the press:

> Every paper, news bulletin, politician, police officer and respectable member of society was yelping at how this demonstrating mob must be stopped . . . From the way it was reported, there must have been people who thought, 'What on earth made those violent Anti-Nazi people want to kill that poor teacher?'[29]

As after the previous protests at Red Lion Square and Lewisham, anti-fascists were forced onto the defensive and widely blamed for the disturbances. The means they chose to defuse this hostility was to campaign repeatedly for a public inquiry for Blair Peach and for the prosecution of the police officers who had killed him.

Rock Against Racism put on a two-day benefit for Peoples Unite at the Rainbow in Finsbury Park, with the Ruts, the Clash, Misty in Roots and Aswad playing. RAR also brought out a leaflet, 'Southall Kids are Innocent':

> There have been police killings before . . . But on April 23rd the police behaved like never before . . . The police were trying to kill our people. They were trying to get even with our culture . . . What free speech needs martial law? What public meeting requires 5,000 people to keep the public out?[30]

Fifteen thousand people marched on Saturday, 28 April, in honour of Blair Peach, with thirteen national trade union banners taken on the demonstration and Ken Gill speaking on behalf of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. He said that the SPG should be disbanded. 'Every one of us', he concluded, 'must take up this call.' Workers at the Sunblest bakery raised £800 for Peach's widow Celia Stubbs.[31]

Jim Nichol recalls travelling to spend an afternoon with Stubbs and being with her as she received visitors: 'The door went more than once. There were people with turbans on and they had buckets, full buckets. They had taken a collection round the factories. So many people had contributed that the men could hardly lift the buckets.'

According to Balwinder Rana, for the week after Peach's death, anti-fascists were everywhere – flyposting, speaking, organising and discussing the lessons of the police riot. The police did not dare to stop them from organising. It was almost as if the police were shamed by the enormity of what they had done.

For eight weeks, Blair Peach's body remained unburied. The day before the funeral, he was accorded a 'lying in state' at the Dominion Theatre in Southall. Mike Barton had the job of protecting Peach's body overnight:

> At dawn, we were supposed to open up the building. There was already a queue of people. Later, two police showed up, an officer and a sergeant. They were asking to see Paul [Holborow] . . . I was rather unhappy but I didn't have the gumption to stop them. After five minutes, the sergeant came out, walking quite quickly. There was the officer, after him, looking straight ahead. Then Paul's head poked out, 'And don't you ever come back!' In the circumstance of a large community and attacks on a white demonstrator who had been killed, the police quite clearly felt out of their depth.

On 13 June 1979, Blair Peach was finally buried. Between 8,000 and 10,000 people joined his funeral procession.[32] On his gravestone were words chosen from the Victorian socialist and artist William Morris, 'Let them remember for all time this man as their brother and as their friend.'

In June 1979, two months after Southall, a memorandum placed in the House of Commons Library by the new Home Secretary Willie Whitelaw gave Peach's cause of death as a fractured skull and referred to a series of occasions prior to Peach's death when objects had been thrown at police officers, implying that the police charge along Beechcroft Avenue was justified as a means to deal with anti-fascist violence:

> [I]t was necessary to deal with a large group of youths near Alexandra Avenue. The throwing of missiles increased and it was necessary for police to use protective shields. It was at this time that an officer at the junction of Northcote Avenue and the Broadway was hit by a brick, which was thrown by someone in a crowd which had gathered in Beechcroft Avenue opposite. His jaw was fractured in three places. Assistance was then summoned to disperse the crowd and Mr Blair Peach was seen at the junction of Beechcroft Avenue and Orchard Avenue having sustained an injury to his head.

Alexandra Avenue and Northcote Avenue, where these objects were said to have been thrown, are on the north side of the Broadway. They are normally just a minute's walk from Beechcroft Avenue but in the crowded tumult of 23 April, they were at least five minutes and several hundred people away from where Peach died.

The inquest into Peach's killing was presided over by John Burton. The coroner was capricious in court, interrupting those acting for Blair Peach's family,[33] and behaving as if his primary business was to distract everyone from the only credible explanation for Peach's killing, namely that he had been struck on the head, accidentally or deliberately, by a member of the SPG, the only police officers in the vicinity at the time.

Three of Burton's decisions, in particular, were criticised at the time and have become, if anything, even harder to justify over time. First, the coroner refused the request of Peach's family to have the case heard by a jury. By tradition, juries were mandatory at all inquests. Since 1926, they had been optional, save where the death occurred in prison, where it was caused by an accident, poisoning, or disease requiring notice to an inspector or government department, or where it occurred in circumstances whose repetition would be prejudicial to public health or safety. The refusal to call a jury was reversed by the Court of Appeal.

The second was Burton's refusal to show the jury the police report into Peach's death.

Third, midway through the inquest, Burton told the jury that there were two 'extreme' theories as to how Peach had been killed. The first, which he referred to for the first time in court (no witness having ever suggested anything close to it), was that a left-wing demonstrator had stood next to Peach and struck him on the head in order to create a martyr. The other, equally 'extreme', theory was that Blair Peach had been killed by the police. Burton failed to go on to explain that this 'extreme' theory was the central finding of the Cass Report and of the investigation into Blair Peach's killing which had already been carried out by the police themselves.

The results of an independent post mortem showed that Peach's death had been caused not by a conventional police baton, but by some kind of home-made weapon, a cosh or a hosepipe filled with lead.[34] The jury were told about a raid on the SPG officers' lockers which found offensive weapons including a leather-covered stick (PC Bint), two knives (PC Woodcock), a large truncheon (Inspector Hopkins), a crowbar, a metal cosh, a whip and a whip handle (PC White) – twenty-six weapons altogether. There was, moreover, no rational basis on which to deny that Peach had been killed by a police officer. The only matter which would still have been in dispute, had the inquest been properly conducted, was whether the killing had been lawful; had the officer who killed Peach had a lawful reason (such as self-defence) for striking him?

Many of the police officers who had been called as witnesses to the inquests barely cooperated at all, with several denying that they remembered anything about the protest. Yet the most striking feature of the evidence, from the point of view of the jury, must have been that none of the officers incriminated each other, none owned up to attacking Peach, and none admitted being anywhere near him when the blow was struck. The two barristers for Blair Peach's family and for the ANL, without Cass's report with its forensic analysis of the officers' history of incriminating admissions, had nothing specific to tie any officer to Peach's death.

The verdict of the jury was death by misadventure – in other words, that the jurors did not accept that there was a deliberate assault on Blair Peach. But the jury added significant riders to their verdict. First, they found that SPG officers should be more closely controlled by senior officers and liaise more closely with

ordinary police officers in future. Second, they suggested that police officers should be issued with maps before major demonstrations. And third, there should be regular inspections of police lockers to check for any other unauthorised weapons.

The Cass Report

Kept from the inquest jury and from public view until 2010 were the findings of Commander Cass, the police officer who conducted the initial investigation. According to his report, Blair Peach had been at the junction of Beechcroft Avenue and Orchard Avenue when he was struck. The blow fell as Peach turned into Orchard Avenue:

> After being hurt it is reported Peach was pushed around the corner and fell to the ground, getting up after the police had gone and making his way unsteadily across the road to No. 71 from which he was later taken to hospital.[35]

Altogether, 14 witnesses had seen a police officer strike Peach on the head, while no witness had seen Peach struck by anyone else. But which officer had struck the fatal blow? Cass noted that there were six officers in vehicle U11 who disembarked and who could have assaulted Peach and he named Officers E (Cass refers to him as an Inspector and Inspector Alan Murray was the only officer of this rank in vehicle U11), H (who must be PC Greville Bint, who accepted at the inquest leaving the vehicle at the same place as Murray), G (PC James Scottow), I (PC Anthony Richardson), J (PC Michael Freestone) and F (PC Raymond White), in that order of probability. He placed Officer F, the driver, at the end of his list.

Cass asked if it was possible that any officers other than those of the SPG could have carried out the killing. His conclusion was 'from enquiries it is now obvious that the officers concerned were Special Patrol Group and there is no credible evidence that any other officers were actually at the scene'.[36]

Officer E, Inspector Murray, eventually admitted leaving the vehicle immediately at the junction of Beechcroft Avenue and Orchard Avenue – in other words, exactly at the place where Ms Atwal had seen an officer strike Peach. His presence was not explained in his first statement. Cass was not impressed by this change of account, terming the original version a 'concoction'. Murray also said in his original interview that there were other (non-SPG) police officers ahead of him at Beechcroft Avenue. This turned out to be another lie.[37]

There were other aspects of Murray's behaviour which also troubled Cass: after the incident with Blair Peach, the SPG officers had gone along Orchard Avenue to the junction with Herbert Road, where an ITN crew had been present: 'Here Officer E and a television camera crew had what it termed a "heated exchange" . . . there is no doubt that Officer E was not as cool as he should have been and the strain was showing'.[38]

Cass produced a second report in September 1979. By now, Murray's behaviour had become even more erratic. He refused to attend an identification parade.

He attended for duty in August with a black eye, which he claimed to have suffered while playing badminton and with a beard, changing his appearance.[39]

Cass identified Inspector Murray as the primary suspect for Peach's killing. His reasons were as follows: Murray, White and Bint had all given an original version of their story, which they later admitted was untrue. The effect of their story was to exculpate Murray and Bint. Why would they have worked together to fabricate an untrue version of events unless one of them had struck the fatal blow?

Of each of Murray, White and Bint, Murray was the most likely candidate to have manufactured the story: he was intelligent. He had a strong and dominating personality. He left the vehicle immediately where Peach was standing. After Peach's killing, Murray took lengthy absences. He sent a solicitor to see Cass, asking for him to be interviewed by a more junior and less demanding questioner.

Just three weeks after the appearance of the Cass Report, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Thomas Hetherington, announced that despite what Hetherington described as Cass's 'very thorough' report, there would be no prosecutions of any police officers.

Shaping the memory of the events

Blair Peach's coroner, John Burton, has been widely criticised over the years for the part he played in the inquest, with campaigners accusing him of having covered up the circumstances of Peach's death. It is an allegation which takes on even greater force if it is remembered that Burton had in his possession the best single evidence as to how Peach died – the Cass inquiry – and that it showed that the most likely cause of death was the very theory which Burton had labelled 'extreme': namely, that a police officer, most likely Inspector Murray, had killed Peach.

Through 1979 and 1980, anti-fascists kept up the pressure, demanding that Peach's murderers be brought to justice. A month after Peach's death, TUC General Secretary Len Murray addressed police cadets at the Metropolitan Police centre at Hendon, demanding the disbanding of the SPG. In the *New Statesman*, the journalist Paul Foot put the case for a public inquiry.[40] In October 1979, *The Guardian* published an advertisement signed by thirty trade unions and several hundred people calling for an inquiry into Peach's death. In January 1980, the *Leveller* magazine reported the names of the six SPG officers who Cass had identified as the main suspects.[41]

Writers including Edward Bond, Michael Rosen, Louis Johnson, Sean Hutton, Tony Dickens and Siegfried Moos wrote poems in Peach's memory. Chris Searle was a friend of Peach, a fellow teacher and union activist. This is how he recalled Peach:

> His was a precious, loving life.
> He built his passion with great bridges
> from the farthest islands of the southern seas

to the mist that clears in the classrooms of Bow –
Life was too short to stand injustice,
to stand the insults that he saw around him.[42]

Mike Carver, Hazel O'Connor and Ralph McTell released songs commemorating Peach's death. This is Linton Kwesi Johnson's 'Reggae fi Peach':

Everywhere you go it's the talk of the day
Everywhere you go you hear people say
That the Special Patrol them are murderers (murderers)

The artist Peter Kennard designed a postcard to raise money for the campaign. It shows an ordinary-seeming postage stamp with a Dixon of Dock Green-type figure addressing two young children. Superimposed over the same is the image held through a magnifying glass; it shows the same policeman striking Peach on the head.

A Friends of Blair Peach Committee[43] called a march to commemorate the anniversary of Peach's death and produced posters naming the police suspects with the words, 'Wanted for the murder of Blair Peach'. Pickets were held outside around fifty police stations, sparking complaints from the Police Federation and calls for the protesters to be prosecuted.[44] Several thousand people attended the march. On the walls of Phoenix School where Peach taught, letters were painted in yellow graffiti six feet high, 'Southall Remembers'. They are still there, forty years later.

On the first anniversary of Peach's death, Southall resident Parita Trevidy was interviewed by New Zealand's *Listener*:

> Southall is ours. For us it's one place in England where we know we're relatively safe because we're among our own people. It's like you going back to New Zealand. We came here for a better life. But now we face racism of the worst sort, from the state, in the form of police brutality, indiscriminate violence from the police force, such as happened on April 23. That's why Blair Peach died. He was in the firing-line . . . between the police and us.'[45]

Notes

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2 Quoted in D. Renton, 'Anti-fascism in the North West 1976–1982', *North West Labour History* 27 (2002), pp. 17–28.
3 J. Pearson (Tameside CARF) to Richard Buckwell (FFAN), 14 December 1978.
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5 J. Pearce, *Race with the Devil: My Journey from Racial Hatred to Rational Love* (Charlotte, NC: St Benedict Press, 2013), p. 54.
6 'Reds stage bogus "racist bombings" to get NF banned', *National Front News* 15 (winter 1978).

7 'NF flat a bomb "plant"', *Guardian*, 12 December 1978.
8 '"Anti-Nazi League" crumbles into squabbling farce', *National Front News* 16 (spring 1979); *National Front News* 23 (June 1980).
9 K. Leech, *Brick Lane 1978: The Events and Their Significance* (Birmingham: AFFOR, 1994 edn), p. 88; National Council for Civil Liberties, *Southall 23 April 1979, Report of the Unofficial Committee of Inquiry* (London: NCCL, 1980), p. 190.
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11 'No Nazis in Southall', *Socialist Unity*, April 1978.
12 S. S. Grewal, 'Capital of the 1970s?' Southall and the conjuncture of 23 April 1979', *Socialist History* 23 (2003), pp. 21–43, p. 16.
13 NCCL, *Southall 23 April 1979*, p. 38.
14 Pearce, *Race with the Devil*, p. 65.
15 'Southall 23 April 1979', in *Blair Peach Primary School, Re-naming Ceremony* (London: Blair Peach School, 1994), p. 37.
16 S. Silver, 'Remember Blair Peach', *Searchlight*, April 1999.
17 A. Nehmad, 'Statement of witness', 30 June 1981.
18 NCCL, *Southall 23 April 1979*, p. 41
19 *Women's Voice*, May 1979.
20 P. Dhillon, 'They're killing us in here', in M. Rowe (ed.), *Spare Rib Reader* (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 461–463.
21 H. Manson, 'Blair Peach: the making of a martyr', *The Listener* (New Zealand), April–May 1980; D. Renton, 'Who was Blair Peach?', *RS21*, 23 April 2014.
22 'The report of Commander Cass into the events surrounding the death of Blair Peach in Southall, west London, on 23 April 1979' ('The Cass Report'), enclosures, p. 357.
23 Gerald's memories are summarised in Anti-Nazi League, *Who Killed Blair Peach?* (London: Anti-Nazi League, 1979), p. 1.
24 Cass Report, enclosures, p. 259.
25 Cass Report, enclosures, p. 143.
26 *Guardian*, 24 September 1979; *Southall Defence Committee Bulletin* 1 (January 1980); 'Amnesty for Southall', leaflet, January 1980.
27 *Hereford Evening News*, 24 April 1979; *Oxford Mail*, 24 April 1979; *Swindon Evening Advertiser*, 24 April 1979; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 25 April 1979.
28 *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, 24 April 1979; *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 24 April 1979; *Oxford Mail*, 24 April 1979; *Lancashire Evening Post*, 24 April 1979.
29 M. Steel, *Reasons to be Cheerful* (London: Scribner, 2001), p. 45.
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31 Campaign Against Racism and Fascism/Southall Rights, *Southall*, p. 59; Mahamdallie, 'The day the police murdered Blair Peach'; D. North, 'Blair Peach', *Socialist Worker*, 28 April 1978; Anti-Nazi League, *Who Killed Blair Peach?*.
32 'Eight thousand mourn Blair Peach', *Daily Express*, 13 June 1979; Ken Leech noted that there were at least five priests in attendance, at least one of them singing the Internationale: Letters, *Guardian*, 15 June 1979.
33 D. Ransom, *The Blair Peach Case: Licence to kill* (London: Friends of Blair Peach Committee, 1980), pp. 19–21.
34 'The cops and the cosh', *Sunday People*, 10 June 1979; also 'Riot death: cops find cosh', *Daily Mirror*, 8 June 1979
35 Cass Report, p. 11.
36 Cass Report, p. 63.
37 Cass Report, p. 73.
38 Cass Report, p. 21.

39 Cass, Second Report, paras 288–290.
40 'London Diary', *New Statesman*, 15 June 1979; 'Call to publish Southall Report', *Morning Star*, 13 July 1979.
41 'Who killed Blair Peach?', *Guardian*, 9 October 1979; 'Six names out of the blue', *Leveller* 34 (January 1980).
42 *Socialist Worker*, 28 April 1979.
43 There was also a Southall Defence Committee tasked with defending the 342 people facing criminal charges in the aftermath of the protests. Suresh Grover of the Southall Monitoring Group (today the Monitoring Group) criticises the decision to launch a Friends of Blair Peach campaign, arguing that it diverted attention from the community campaign and blaming the SWP. 'It was difficult . . . You'd think individual organisations . . . because of the severity of what happened would come together to save a town. But actually self-interest still dictated on a large basis': A. Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movement* (London: Pluto, 2013), p. 53.
44 'Peach group name police on "Wanted" poster', *The Times*, 22 April 1980.
45 H. Manson, 'Blair Peach: the making of a martyr'.

9

KEEPING ON KEEPING ON

As the May 1979 general election approached, the leadership of the National Front was showing ever more difficulty in responding to public opposition. The public marches which the Front had once used to win new recruits, were becoming fewer; the risk of street opposition was too great. Meanwhile, such was the extent of anti-fascist opposition that even the normal forms of democratic politics – street meetings or public addresses by election candidates – became harder and harder to organise. A growing number of inner-party critics could be only silenced by the promise of the Front's leaders that their party was on the verge of an electoral breakthrough. This was the answer the Front's leaders gave to any sort of challenge. Whether it was the ANL outside their meetings or disgruntled Front supporters inside, the solution to any difficulty was the election. A high vote would solve their problems.

Articles in *Spearhead* insisted that elections were '*the* activity around which all else in the National Front revolved' and that their organisation was 'a serious and seriously-taken political entity'.[1] By standing in excess of three hundred candidates, the Front guaranteed itself party political broadcasts.[2] The Front told journalists that it expected to receive in excess of half a million votes.

The members of the NF were unable to put their message across: their graffiti was painted out and they could not march without fear of disturbances. The National Front also had increasing difficulty in hiring halls outside election periods. According to one supporter of the party, Tony Simms, 'The trouble we had booking rooms for meetings was unbelievable . . . We had to lie about who we were.' Front branches obtained bookings under false names: in Redbridge, it was 'Woden Football Club', and members were instructed to remove their badges and not talk politics in the bar afterwards.[3] When contacted by the Front, Labour-controlled local authorities such as Newham refused to accept their bookings; requiring the Front to take these councils to the courts in an attempt to reverse the bans.[4]

Ray Hill, a British Movement supporter turned anti-fascist mole, attended a National Front election meeting in Leicester in early 1979 which was addressed by two local speakers, Tony Reed-Herbert and John Peacock:

> Both Reed-Herbert and Peacock presented themselves as the sweet and reasonable face of the party. How outrageous, they declared, that they should be branded as Nazis by their opponents . . . They intended no harm to black people. They would repatriate them humanely, not to say generously. Their gripe was not against Jews as such but only against those who misused their power and influence against the interests of Britain and its people.[5]

In March 1979, music journalists Angus Mackinnon and Charles Shaar Murray interviewed the members of the RAR collective for *NME*: Red Saunders ('big, bearded and ebullient'), Syd Shelton ('wiry and compact'), John Dennis ('gaunt . . . thoughtful'), Lucy Toothpaste ('uptight') and Kate Webb ('friendly'). They asked Widgery if RAR was capable of integrating a wider variety of musical forms: heavy metal for example, or disco? 'We don't have any ideological bans on any kind of music,' he answered. 'We've just found it easier to reach certain types of bands.'[6]

In April, Merseyside Anti-Racist Alliance and the ANL organised a joint protest outside a Front meeting in New Brighton, with a thousand people taking part.[7]

On 21 April, the Labour Party took out advertisements in every major music paper: 'Don't just rock against racism . . . Vote against it. Vote Labour.' Red Saunders wrote to the *NME* in response:

> Don't just what? We've just rhinoed around the country, arguing and playing our unmistakeable anti-racist message and it's left us seven grand in debt . . . Ok, it seems like most of us will be putting our shaky little crosses in Labour's box on May 4th. Rock Against Thatcher – we mean it! But no illusions. We're looking forward to seeing Labour start to really Rock Against Racism: ending the racist immigration laws, abolishing Sus, etc.[8]

As the May 1979 elections approached, local papers increasingly sided with the anti-Nazis. Even the *Leicester Mercury*, which had previously been willing to run articles warning of the impact migration would have on local services, finally answered its critics and came out against the NF: 'To give the National Front the chance of power to implement its cruel policies would be a rejection of humanity.'[9]

The proximity of the election did not lead to any discernible moderation of the Front's politics. The party's general election leaflet contained a declaration of the Front's war against Communism and an allusion to the conspiracy theories which proclaimed that behind Communism stood a Jewish influence:

> We must recognise that the object of this wider movement of which Communism is a part is to subject us to the rule, not of Russia as such, but

> of a cosmopolitan elite, of whose aims Russia is merely an instrument and America an instrument of a different kind.[10]

In May 1979, the Front stood 303 candidates.[11] This slate was more than any minor party since 1918. Yet every Front candidate lost his or her deposit; those alone cost the organisation £50,000 and for months after the election, local groups were doing little more than fundraise to make up for the loss.[12] The 190,000 votes obtained by the Front represented a result of just 600 votes per seat or an average vote share of around 1.6 per cent. In every seat where the Front had stood in both the October 1974 and the May 1979 elections, its support fell by a minimum of a quarter and in some cases three-quarters of its previous vote.

By May 1979, the historian of migration Colin Holmes writes, 'the prospect of the National Front becoming a serious political force, a prospect which could not have been ruled out in the early 1970s, had evaporated'.[13]

For Andrew Fountaine and others of the National Front old guard, the explanation for the Front's poor showing in the 1979 election was Tyndall's association with Nazism, which had proved repugnant to voters. The answer, it followed, was to purge Tyndall himself and 'To ensure that the image of the Party presented to the British people is at all times one which they recognise as a reflection of their own and not having its origin in other places at other times'.[14] When it became clear that Fountaine could not find a majority in the Front's Directorate, he left, forming a break-away National Front Constitutional Movement.

'It was extraordinary how fast the Front declined after the election,' recalls Steve Jeffreys. 'Where they had been active, you hardly saw them at all.'

Correspondence between Front supporters shows their demoralisation. In summer 1979, Jenny Doyle, a founder member of the Front, wrote to another member, Richard Verrall – these days best known as the author of the Holocaust Denial pamphlet, *Did Six Million Really Die?* – but wrongly perceived by Doyle as a moderate and an ally. Tyndall and Webster, Doyle complained, were 'non-entities', guilty of repeated error of judgement. She argued that 'the only way the Party can succeed is without them'. Doyle criticised Tyndall and Webster for having stuck to a policy of compulsory repatriation, a policy which required a level of violence that 'the British people' would never accept: 'Tyndall and Webster were trying to sell the unsellable, no wonder they [i.e. the Front's critics] call us the party of hate.'

Morale, Doyle wrote, was 'at an all-time low, many previously dedicated activists have told me they will resign'. The only solution would be if the Front could rid itself 'of all the National Socialist diehards, [and] this will not be easy with the Directorate in the hold of many of John Tyndall stooges'.[15]

John Tyndall blamed Martin Webster, Tyndall's lieutenant since the early 1960s, for all the Front's difficulties. Webster had been the target of a series of press reports identifying him as gay.[16] Tyndall, who had been complaining privately for several years about Webster's homosexuality,[17] took to *Spearhead* to object to Webster's 'filthy language, bizarre gestures and frequently total loss of control',

accusing his erstwhile colleague of 'reducing working relations to a shambles and creating an atmosphere of rancour and network', which Tyndall blamed for the National Front's derisory general election vote.[18]

At a meeting of the NF Directorate in October 1979, Tyndall tried to force Webster to resign as the Front's national organiser. He lost the vote there and at the Front's Annual General Meeting later the same month, before resigning at a Directorate meeting in January 1980. Tyndall then formed a New National Front, which in due course would become today's British National Party (BNP).[19]

Within eight months of the 1979 general election, the National Front had split into three hostile parties, with separate groups led by Andrew Fountaine, John Tyndall and Martin Webster. The latter remained in control of a much diminished organisation, with the NF's Wandsworth's branch publicising a speech by Webster with the title 'Why the Establishment Condones Red Violence Against the NF'.[20]

The few parts of the Front to retain any vitality were its youth and music wings. Rock Against Communism had its first public outing in August 1979, at London's Conway Hall. Around a hundred and fifty NF supporters turned up, to face anti-fascist protests. The Dentists played their songs 'White Power' and 'Kill the Reds'.

Joe Pearce hoped Skrewdriver would also play the Conway Hall event, as the band's singer Ian Stuart Donaldson had by now joined the Front. The difficulty was that Skrewdriver, almost alone among the far-right bands, still had hopes of a wider audience. The band had once been reviewed in *Sniffin' Glue* and still had a record deal with a non-fascist label, Rough Trade. As late as summer 1979, Ian Stuart and his band were still afraid to declare openly for the Front and failed to show up at the Conway Hall gig. The repeated rumours of the band's new loyalties were enough, however, to alert Skrewdriver's distributors, Rough Trade, who smashed every Skrewdriver disk they possessed and dumped the pieces in bags outside the venue.[21] Over the following months, Stuart would write to *Melody Maker* and even telephone *Searchlight* magazine, claiming the stories about him were false.[22]

Several of the Front's younger supporters defected to the British Movement, whose long-term hostility to electoral politics now appeared to have been vindicated. Over the following decade, all sections of the British far right would agree that there was little point in campaigning in any sustained way for seats in Parliament and accepted that there was no nationalist majority to which the right could appeal. Even John Tyndall could be heard arguing that the NF was 'never going to make it through the ballot box'.[23] New individuals came to dominate the far right, like Nicky Crane, the British Movement's North Kent organiser, who appeared naked to the waist on the front cover of Decca Records' album *Strength Through Oi!*. Crane was given a suspended sentence for affray, after attacking a black family. Then, after a second racist attack, he received a four-year jail sentence.[24] As this new generation of far-right supporters turned to violence, so did the BNP and the British Movement. All three groups were shaped by the National Front's election defeat.

Rock Against the Tories

After the election, both left and right attempted to evaluate the new situation. 'For the rest of 1979', recalls Pete Alexander,

> there was actually very little Nazi activity to be 'anti'; the big focus for them – and us – of the general election had come and gone. The ANL centre still functioned for a while, mainly I suppose because of the Blair Peach campaign. Sometime in 1979, Paul Holborow, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Mike and Joan, the four ANL full-timers, all moved on.

Not long after, they were joined by Ernie Roberts who resigned as treasurer. Others from the original steering committee remained, however, including Miriam Karlin.

According to Jerry Fitzpatrick, 'The key organisers were in a state of physical exhaustion; it had been the most intense period of our lives and we were tired. Also with Thatcher coming in, she was a more sophisticated and determined threat.'

In Merseyside, Ronnie Williams also recalls the movement slowing down:

> I moved to Runcorn and the Anti-Nazi League was winding down then. We had one disco in Netherley which got around thirty people where the previous one that summer had sold four hundred tickets. I know this because I wrote them out by hand on pre-cut cardboard.

The anti-racist movement was both larger and more passive.

Of course, the Front had not altogether gone away. On 29 June 1979, supporters of the Front attacked black and white dancers at a rave at Acklam Hall, Ladbroke Grove, in west London. The black street-poet Benjamin Zephaniah was there and dedicated his poem, 'Call It What Yu Like', to the young punks who fought off the National Front that evening: 'Outside is a shout / De Punks are about / A shout / Nazis out, Nazis out / O Punk, O Punk, de fight nu long / Yu battle well'.[25]

On 8 July 1979, RAR-supporter Alan Vega of Suicide was attacked by Front supporters while supporting the Clash at Crawley.[26] According to Roddy Radiation of the Specials, 'They got a real beating, a lot of dodgy Skins . . . I saw [Alan Vega] backstage afterwards, covered in blood.' Roddy's colleague, Jerry Dammers, a former mod who could remember watching skinheads in the 1960s dancing to black music, was later to cite this gig a decisive moment in the development of the Specials and therefore of Two Tone: 'I thought, "We have to get through to these people."'[27]

Sham 69's final concert was held that September at the Rainbow in Finsbury Park. Some forty or so far-right skinheads forced their way in, twice invading the stage. According to Val Hennessy, writing in *The Guardian*:

> A faction of BM toughs (exclusively male) form a procession, chanting, thumping and shouting Sieg Heil. By Sham's fifth song they had clambered on stage and halted the show. In the ensuing imbroglio beer cans were hurled and bottles flung. A girl got a cigarette end in her eye, another had her glasses smashed.

A tearful Jimmy Pursey was just about able to force his way to the microphone where he gave a last and final farewell. 'I fucking loved you. I fucking did everything for you. And all you wanna do is fight.'[28]

Deprived of their heroes, Sham's audience sought other bands which they could support. One was two-tone band Madness, who were performing at Camden's Electric Ballroom from 16 to 18 November. Refurnished just the year before, the Ballroom was one of London's best venues, with a huge stage, concealed by a tiny shop-front entrance on Camden High Street. An *NME* interview with Madness in November saw the journalist Deanne Pearson clashing repeatedly with the band's Cathal Smyth about the presence of Front supporters in the Madness audience, with Smyth insisting there was no problem:

> You just don't understand, do you? They're just a group of kids who have to take out their anger and frustration on something. NF don't really mean much to them. Why should I stop them coming to our gigs, that's all they've got.[29]

On stage in Camden, Madness's warm-up act Red Beans & Rice were fronted by Lavern Brown, a black singer. Skinheads in the front row made monkey noises and gave the Nazi salute. Skrewdriver's Ian Stuart Donaldson later claimed to have been a Madness roadie and said that Suggs was his friend,[30] but Suggs' response to the attacks on Lavern Brown was to confront the racists. He ran onto the stage and grabbed the microphone, which he used to fight the skinheads, hospitalising two of them.[31]

Winter 1979 saw the arrest of anti-fascists at Chapel Market. According to Anna Sullivan, 'The chief superintendent wanted to put an end to all our protests.' Anti-fascists responded by setting up a Chapel Market 11 defence campaign. Not all officers were equally opposed to the anti-fascists. Anna recalls one man, Inspector Barker, watching her sell papers. A small group of fascists set upon them, kicking with steel-capped boots: 'Suddenly Barker leapt out of his car and chased this fascist down Upper Street. I remember him saying to his colleagues, "We've got a chap in there and he's just attacked that lovely lady from the Anti-Nazi League."' This was not a usual occurrence. At the next conflict, the police tried to arrest Sullivan. 'You could tell they were the Special Patrol Group, they didn't have numbers, just initials on their epaulettes. "You'll have to move," one said, "you're obstructing the highway. Move on or I'll arrest you." They weren't interested in anyone else.' The scene degenerated from high drama to domestic farce. Sullivan's daughter and her comrade Unmesh Desai tried to protect Sullivan from arrest. The contents of her bag were strewn all over the ground: 'I was shouting at him, "Unmesh, whatever you do, pick up my make-up!"'

In November 1979, Southwark National Front organiser Kenneth Matthews was caught trying to attack the Union Place Resource Centre near Oval with a firebomb. Over the next year and half, twenty-four further physical attacks were recorded by supporters of the Front or the British Movement on buildings associated with the left, including the News from Nowhere bookshop in Liverpool, Community Press in Islington and the Brighton Resource Centre.[32]

In 1980, the Thatcher government announced its intention to introduce tougher immigration laws, a decision widely interpreted as a sop to former NF voters.[33] The result was the British Nationality Act 1981. The trend was to swap anti-fascism for a different anti-racist strategy. In Manchester, Greg Dropkin 'came to the conclusion that those who saw the fight against fascism as the conclusion were mistaken. I tried to read about the rise of Hitler . . . My conclusion was that we weren't in a parallel situation.' Dropkin argued with the Longsight CARF group that the priority was to fight state racism rather than the Front.

Elsewhere in the North West, there were protests against threatened deportations: of Saeed Rehman, Abdul Azadand and Nasira Begum. Protesters also challenged a Home Office decision refusing to allow Anwar Ditta to bring her children from Pakistan. Lawyer and author Steve Cohen was another former anti-fascist now campaigning full-time against immigration controls.[34]

The Anti-Nazi League sponsored the Campaign Against Racist Laws. Several leading members of the League joined CARL's executive committee and there were attempts to build a new anti-racist movement, opposed not just to fascism but to institutional racism as well. Jerry Fitzpatrick of the ANL became the treasurer of the Campaign Against Racist Laws and Dave Cook from the Communist Party was national secretary. There were joint chairs, one from each of the big Indian Workers' Associations: Avtar Jouhl and Prem Singh. The CARL group in Bradford was central to several Yorkshire campaigns against threatened deportations.

In spring 1980, Peter Hain, still seen as a member of Labour's hard left as a result of his role in the Anti-Nazi League, agreed to chair 'the debate of the decade', between the Labour Party and the revolutionary left; it was held in Central Hall and attended by over 2,000 people. Hain's introduction to the published form of the discussion began by contrasting the mood of the late 1960s, when such militant unions as the engineers' AUEW had seemed capable of transforming society, and of the early 1980s, when the left of all descriptions lacked popular appeal. In his words:

> The trade union movement as a whole is in political disarray, unsure of its grass roots base, uncertain about its national direction; the left outside the Labour Party is weaker in terms of its political base; the student movement is passive and middle-of-the-road in its politics; and the Labour Party, whilst moving significantly leftwards, still has not shaken off a dominant right-wing leadership. Above all, socialism patently lacks the appeal and allegiance in the working class which it once had.[35]

An anti-Front protest was held in Lewisham in April 1980. Christine Collette wrote up the protest for West Lewisham Labour Party:

> Notice was taken that the Anti-Nazi League was assembling at Lewisham Town Hall at 1 p.m. and it was decided to maximise support by calling ALCARAF supporters to rally in the same area . . . Permission to use the car park having been refused, the rally was held outside Eros House. Anti-Nazi League demonstrators joined the rally and there were speakers from Lewisham Council and the Trades Council. Hundreds of local men and women, black and white, turned out to demonstrate against the National Front.[36]

Stuart Hall told the Communist Party's magazine *Marxism Today* that Thatcher represented 'authoritarian populism . . . a weakening of democratic forms and initiatives, but not their suspension'. Hall sought to explain Thatcher's success as a cultural project, using family values and Conservative morality to place its imprint on political, economic and ideological life. If Thatcherism was a form of cultural politics, then it followed that the Tories could best be resisted in the cultural sphere. Hall praised RAR in particular as 'one of the timeliest and best constructed of cultural interventions, repaying serious and extended analysis'.[37]

Yet the victories which Hall praised all pre-dated the general election. A July 1980 article in the *Morning Star* newspaper criticised the way the ANL had developed in recent months. Dave Cook complained that 'Despite the significance of its past role, the ANL has tended to become submerged in [the Campaign Against Racist Laws] and the Blair Peach Committee. It [has] only come to life in response to a fascist mobilisation.' What was the alternative? Cook sought 'a perspective to redevelop the ANL, enabling it to play a more general propaganda role'.[38]

In autumn 1980, the SWP appointed Pete Alexander to replace Paul Holborow as the secretary of the Anti-Nazi League. The focus of opposition was no longer the Front, but the more violent ultra-Nazis of the British Movement.[39]

Anti-fascists called protests in Brighton and Hove. There were three National Front rallies there at the Level, a piece of ground in the town centre where the left and trade unions had traditionally met, as Tony Greenstein describes:

> At the first demo, large numbers of people met at the Level while the fascists mobilised and marched from Hove towards Brighton. Those of us who went up to confront them were outnumbered and there were large numbers of arrests, including myself, as groups of us took them on. On the second march we occupied their meeting place (Norfolk Square) and fooled both the police and the fascists who had an initial pre-meeting on the beach. We gradually drained people from Norfolk Square down to the beach where we confronted them . . . By the time of their third demonstration they had lost all credibility among their own followers and they could only hold a meeting at the Level because the police surrounded it in a ring.[40]

Rock Against Racism meanwhile were approached by an Irish Republican political prisoner, Felim O'Hagan, who sent the group a note handwritten in pencil in block capitals on stuck-together pieces of cigarette paper, warning them that unless there were protests in England Bobby Sands would be dead in just a few weeks. 'After Southall in 1979 and 1980,' Jerry Fitzpatrick recalls, 'I organised with John Dennis and John Ellis a Rock Against Racism tour to Belfast and Derry in support of the H-Block prisoners who went on hunger strike for political status.' Mainland bands to join the Rock Against Repression and Sectarianism tour included Oxy and the Morons. Meanwhile RAR spawned any number of mimetic offshoots, Rock Gegen Rechts in West Germany, France's Rock Against Police, Rock Against Racism USA and Rock Against Racism groups in Sweden, Norway, Belgium and Holland.[41]

Annie Skinner recalls three RAR gags in Oxford in 1980, played at different venues along Cowley Road, with bands including Criminal Damage, the Stereotypes and Alien Kulture. The last of these were an Asian punk band[42] named in response to Thatcher's speech warning that Britain was being swamped. Ausaf Abbas, Azhar Rana and Pervez Bilgrami played with 'token white' Huw Jones. 'When I was at school,' Rana recalls, 'I had to hide every playtime because there was a gang of twenty boys going around Paki-bashing.' With songs such as 'Arranged Marriage', 'Asian Youth' and 'Airport Arrest', the band played some thirty gigs dressed in kurta and Dr Marten boots. John Peel repeatedly played their single 'Culture Crossover', with its message of 'first generation, illegal immigrants, second generation juvenile delinquents'.[43] In 1981, Alien Kulture would disband. 'No matter how much we railed against Thatcher, she was winning,' Ausaf Abbas recalls, 'RAR was fading and Thatcher was unstoppable.'[44]

'As Thatcherism ground on,' Widgery recalls:

> meeting precious little effective resistance, RAR became rather less fashionable in the fickle world of rock . . . RAR was also a victim of its own success in another way. There was now Rock Against Everything, inner city ring roads to politics.[45]

According to Ruth Gregory, after the release of the Rock Against Racism album with Virgin Records, John Dennis and Saunders decided that RAR should become a limited company, with themselves as directors controlling the funds: 'John just wanted to make RAR a business and himself the boss. John always wore a suit. It was a moddish suit, two-toneish, but still a suit.' Gregory, Shelton and Widgery made a bid to save RAR's elected committee from becoming, in effect, a board of directors and argued 'It is vital to the grassroots movement that the workers in RAR's central office continue to operate as a collective.' They were subsequently denied the right to put their position to conference, leaving them no option but to resign. Webb and Minter resigned from the office and from the committee, leaving only Dennis and Saunders.

The campaign was splintering, with its former advocates travelling in all sorts of different directions. In a few cases elsewhere, former leftists 'flipped over' all the way to the far right. The former *Socialist Worker* journalist Gary Bushell became a *Sun* journalist.[46] Members of the punk band and former RAR-act Crisis, committed anti-fascists in the 1970s,[47] would join the Front (Tony Wakeford) or spawn spin-off bands fascinated with the look and style of interwar fascism and seemingly sympathetic to it (Wakeford's Sol Invictus, Douglas P's Death in June).[48]

Those born later

On 2 January 1981, Monday Club supporter and Tory MP Jill Knight called for bans on 'noisy' West Indian parties, suggesting that white families would be entitled to take direct action to bring such events to an end. Two weeks later, on 18 January, a fire broke out at a birthday party being held at 439 New Cross Road in Deptford and thirteen people aged between 14 and 22 died. All were black. Campaigners including Darcus Howe and John La Rose demanded the truth of the deaths and justice for the victims. It was widely believed that the building had been attacked by white supporters of the National Front: other buildings in the vicinity to have been burnt down included the Moonshot Youth Club, which had been a base of the left four years earlier, and the Albany Theatre, which had been a popular venue for Rock Against Racism gigs. The coroner's ultimate decision of an open verdict was widely blamed on poor forensic investigation and a hostility to black witnesses. The protests culminated in a Black People's Day of Action on 2 March. Some 25,000 people marched, chanting, 'Thirteen dead, nothing said'. According to Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'The New Cross fire had happened in London but the mobilisation was national: Manchester, Birmingham Leeds, Liverpool, Bristol, Derby, Leicester . . . a lot of the mobilisation was done through sound systems and local radio stations.'[49] It was the greatest black-led demonstration against racism the country has ever seen.

On 6 April 1981, the police launched what they said was an exercise to arrest burglars and robbers in south London: 'Operation Swamp'. It manifested itself in very large numbers of arrests and searches of black youths and very few arrests for robbery. Four days later, crowds of black youths gathered to protest in Brixton. They were attacked by the police. Fighting between the police and a mixed crowd of black and white youth saw 82 arrests, 279 police officers injured and 56 police cars damaged or destroyed. Lord Justice Scarman's later Report called the events a 'spontaneous reaction' against 'a hostile police force'.[50]

In spring 1981, one veteran Rock Against Racism campaigner, Colin Fancy, moved into a squat on New Cross Road, on the very street where the fire had broken out. In June, he helped to start a walk-out against youth unemployment with over a thousand pupils leaving their secondary schools to protest. In July, he was at Thames Polytechnic, playing a Right to Work benefit with his punk band. The week before he had been due to play at the Hambrough Tavern but the management had cancelled the gig. That Friday, 3 July 1981, while Fancy was at Thames

Poly, a gig featuring 4 Skins, the Business and the Last Resort, saw skinheads coming into an area which had previously witnessed numerous racial conflicts.[51] Asian youth set the pub ablaze. The tabloids warned of fighting between black and white: 'Terror in Southall', 'Race Riots'. The historian of black struggle, A. Sivanandan, puts this incident squarely in the context of the police riot that Southall had witnessed two years before and the criminalisation of those who had protested against the National Front: 'Southall . . . would not be lightly invaded again, as 3 July 1981 was to prove.'[52]

The next morning, Colin Fancy travelled to Leeds to see the Specials play RAR's Northern Carnival at Leeds. There he learned that Toxteth, too, was burning.[53]

The Leeds carnival was RAR's last significant event. Misty in Roots, the Specials, Joolz the Poet and the Au Pairs played,[54] with the event ending in Potternewton Park, the venue for Leeds' West Indian Carnival. Some 20,000 people joined in, picketed by just forty-two Front supporters.[55] Among the people in the anti-fascist crowd was Khadijah Ibrahim:

> There were the Specials and I just remember pushing through this crowd under the feet of people to get to the front. Oh my God, you don't see these people, you see them on *Top of the Pops* on TV and they were live and direct in front of me.[56]

Her poem 'Rock Against Racism' recalls the scene.[57]

The Specials were in the charts for their greatest single, 'Ghost Town', a lament for industrial Britain, the world of their youth that was now under attack from unemployment, poverty and Thatcher's government. When the Specials took to the stage, the song was number two at the charts. The next week, on the same day that Merseyside's senior policeman said that his city's black population was 'the product of liaisons between white prostitutes and black sailors', the song reached number one. Yet the Specials themselves were exhausted. In the middle of 'Ghost Town', the band's trombonist Rico Rodriguez declined to play his usual solo. According to the guitarist Roddy Radiation, 'We were a band in name only.'[58]

Pete Alexander was the chief steward at the Leeds Carnival:

> When we went past shops, kids would peel off and steal things, so I stopped the march and held a short meeting with the main local stewards to discuss the problem. We agreed that this was our march and we weren't having it spoiled by crime, so after that we sent our stewards, local youth, out to every shop we passed and there were quite a few of them and we stopped the pilfering.

The Leeds event was Rock Against Racism's farewell party, as Red Saunders recalls: 'There were splits on the committee. There were arguments about money, bidding for grants.' Part of the problem was RAR's very success: 'When we had first started, our first editorial said we wanted crisis music, rebel music. Well, try listening to the Specials' "Ghost Town". There hadn't been music like that when we started.'

The next Saturday, there were riots in over thirty British towns and cities, including both areas associated with anti-fascist protests such as Handsworth and Southall and others with no such history: Blackpool, Fleetwood, Kettering. That weekend, twelve young Asian men – including the writer Tariq Mehmood – were arrested in Bradford, accused of making explosive substances with an intent to endanger property and life. Their defence was to admit having the weapons, but to insist that they had prepared them 'to be prepared should the need arise, to protect themselves and their community against fascists'. The trial which followed has gone down in popular and legal folklore, both for the manner in which it was conducted and for the outcome. Defence advocates picked up the supposed weapons at court, even on one extraordinary occasion throwing one of the bombs at the judge's desk, in order to illustrate its uselessness as a weapon. They pointed to the number of racial attacks in Britain, which were running at the rate of 15,000 per year.

The defendants were members of the United Black Youth League, a successor to the previous Bradford Asian Youth Movement. In campaign materials, the UBYL insisted that at the time of their arrest they were part of a growing anti-racist movement, they had campaigned for the children of Anwar Ditta to be brought to the UK. They had supported the demand of the Harrogate College Students Union to remove the National Front's Andrew Brons who was lecturing there.[59] They drew on the thirteen deaths in New Cross and other recent racist murders. They insisted that their preparation had been spurred by credible rumours that the Front was planning to march again through Bradford. The UBYL had received threats from fascists and in July, at the time of the arrests, it had been organising joint patrols with the local IWA to keep the community safe. While the police and local press reports insisted that the group's ambition had been aggressive – to confront and attack the state – the defendants held together, insisting that their weapons had been assembled for no purposes other than defensive ones. A campaign was established outside court, with open planning meetings and meeting of up to eight hundred people in support of the arrested men. Bradford 12 Support groups were also established in London, Leicester, Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham. On the opening day of the trial, over five hundred people demonstrated their support for the defendants.[60]

The acquittal of the Bradford 12 was an extraordinary triumph but, as with the last RAR Carnival in Leeds, it marked the end of a period of anti-racist victories.

Squaddism

'By late 1981,' Pete Alexander insists, 'it had become pretty clear that the BM threat had passed.' The SWP leadership decided that the ANL should be wound down:

> There was no big announcement about the office closing or the staff declining to just me or us no longer sending out mailings and so on. In fact, nominally, the ANL continued to exist and nominally I continued to be its organiser.

> Letting things run down like this meant the BM couldn't take advantage and, indeed, if they or some other Nazi group did revive, so could we.

Before May 1979, anti-fascism had been a mass movement, with widespread support. By 1980 or 1981, it had become something different – a residual cause around which different people grouped locally, in response to far-right mobilisations. As the structure of the campaign atrophied, so the character of its supporters changed. Whereas once they might have been Labour or even Liberal voters, young and new to politics, by 1980 or early 1981 these fresh faces had drifted away. Anti-fascism was reduced down to the permanent cadres of the far left.

In winter 1981–1982, the SWP decided to disengage from the physical clashes with the right. The leadership turned sharply, deciding that the anti-fascist squads which had grown up in Hackney, Manchester and Hatfield needed to be shut down and that any members of their party who would not accept their decision had to be expelled. This move was justified by an argument that the Front had been decisively routed. But the Front and its split-offs were still very much alive. In February 1981, Peter Hain's house was firebombed, days later his home address and the addresses of other anti-fascists were published in *South London News*, a Front paper.[61]

Throughout 1981–1982, fights continued between fascists and anti-fascists around Chapel Market in Islington.[62] In December 1981, nine anti-fascists from Manchester were jailed for between six and fifteen months, for possession of offensive weapons. The problems began with a phone call from a student, Michelle Mole, complaining of attacks by skinheads. They were stopped by the police, arrested and ultimately agreed to plead guilty to weapons charges. Michelle Mole became a prosecution witness. The anti-fascists, including John Penney who was seen as the leader of the Manchester squad, received sentences of between six and fifteen months. On their release in summer 1982, the SWP disowned them and refused to support any but two of the arrested men, drawing on other incidents where the squaddists had clashed with their erstwhile comrades, including at the SWP's Easter camp at Skegness and even at the Leeds Carnival.[63] Andy Strouthous was sent by the SWP Central Committee to Manchester to isolate the supporters of the squad within that district.

Something like thirty SWP members were ultimately expelled for squaddism, with around a hundred people leaving the group in sympathy with them.[64] Those who were expelled attempted to challenge the politics of the parent organisation, before forming their own organisation, Red Action, which later sponsored Anti-Fascist Action, the main anti-fascist campaign on the left between 1985 and 1992.

In north London, Anna Sullivan felt like a mother to the young men who sustained the fight against fascism. She could not understand the complaints against them from within the SWP:

> If you are involved in a movement that engages in conflict with violent opposition, then unfortunately as well as all the good comrades, you will

> attract people with the excitement of the conflict. For me, it was an ideological battle but it became a physical conflict for survival.

Mark Steel recalls going home after one demo, only to find the organisers being condemned for failing to smash the Front from the streets:

> All this was to miss the point of the Anti-Nazi League. The exuberant school kids who distributed the badges, the tenants who formed groups to wash off the graffiti . . . were the real army that defeated fascism in 1979. It should be *celebrated* that most people who attended the counter-demonstrations weren't hardened brawlers and were probably secretly frightened. For it proves that thugs can be beaten by ideas.[65]

Mick O'Farrell wrote an open letter to his former SWP comrades:

> [I]t is on the estates and in the pubs, in the youth clubs and in the schools that the real damage is being done . . . How can anyone claim that the [NF's] active support had not risen? How many more fire bombs and racial attacks will it take? How many more times will dedicated comrades be derided as mindless thugs no better than the Nazis for fighting them where they operate?[66]

Thinking about the expulsions since, O'Farrell insisted that in turning on the squaddists, the SWP leadership was cracking down on a generation of working-class activists who were independent of the supposed leaders of their party:

> I'm not privy to the inner machinations of the central committee so I can only go on my own political analysis [which] was that the Squads had developed a certain autonomy which they [i.e. the SWP leadership] could not control. In my experience the concept of working class autonomy or spontaneity is something they celebrate when they talk in the abstract but not when it occurs within their own organisation.[67]

Alan Gibbons supported the expulsions. In his view, the SWP had been dragged into a cycle of tit-for-tat struggles with the Front's remaining members. The battles were depoliticised, he argued, and cut off from any mass audience. On one occasion, he had been sent as part of a group to attack a Front meeting in Blackburn. This was not a positive experience. 'It was not a mass activity. We were a group of about twelve men, beating people up. I didn't like the feel of it. It felt sad and squalid.' He was glad to see the squads wound down: 'The people who come on anti-racism demonstrations are working, they've got families. We can't train people for violence in the way fascists can. Their thugs will always be better than our thugs.'

Matthew Caygill recalled Andy Strouthous travelling to a meeting in Leeds to justify the new line:

> One comrade got very emotional about what a betrayal this was. Comrades really had put their lives and souls into the Anti-Nazi League and it was hard to break from the memory of the high-points and the routines of activity, especially as Leeds remained a hot zone for Nazi activity.

Meanwhile, most anti-fascists were thinking in a different direction. Former RAR or ANL supporters took up different radical causes, including anti-deportation struggles, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the revived movement against youth unemployment. There was the rise of Tony Benn and later there was also Livingstone in London and the Militant Tendency in Liverpool. There was never any particular date on which the League's office was formally closed, although in practice the movement was run down between summer 1981 and the end of that year. The ANL badges were packed away and the movement entered into memory.

In autumn 1981, *Temporary Hoarding* published what was to be its final issue. Sheffield RAR admitted to having

> packed up around the beginning of 1980, partly through exhaustion, partly through the temporary trailing off of activities after Thatcher got in. But also because we were fed up of grovelling to musicians in bands who were only interested in RAR as a way of getting gigs.

In Brighton, Rock Against Racism joined together with No Nukes Music to set up a group, Revolutions per Minute, raising money for CND, RAR, ANL, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Gay Switchboard and the New Cross Defence Fund. Bradford RAR was now one of the older groups, boasting of continuous existence since early 1979:

> Fortunately we have always managed to get a lot of support from the student unions at the university . . . At the moment we're supporting CND's No Nukes Music Tour with the Thompson Twins and a benefit for CND's Easter Trans Pennine March.

As late as July 1981, Rock Against Racism organised an event in Hackney's Clissold Park promising to Funk the [royal] Wedding. The bands playing – Tribesman, Movement, Monkey Business – were a step downwards even from that spring's Leeds Carnival.[68]

From her vantage point of Chapel Market, Anna Sullivan recalls that 'Even the fascists were being exhausted and turning public opinion against them . . . Committed passionate resistance wore them down. They couldn't best that.'

The historian of British fascism, Richard Thurlow writes that

> At the time of the 1979 general election [NF] membership was around 10,000. With the poor performance in the 1979 general election and the

> split between Tyndall and Webster, the numbers collapsed . . . After the removal of Webster, membership slumped to reach 3,148 on 1 October 1984 and fell precipitously to just under 1,000 in January 1985.[69]

An organisation that had shed nine-tenths of its membership in a little over five years was evidently far less of a threat than it had been.

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10

CONCLUSION

The combined anti-fascist campaign was the largest mass movement in Britain since the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Between 1977 and 1979, around nine million Anti-Nazi League leaflets were distributed and 750,000 badges sold. Around 250 ANL branches mobilised some 40,000–50,000 members. On the strength of individual donations, the League raised £600,000 between 1977 and 1980. As for Rock Against Racism, in 1978 alone, RAR organised three hundred gigs and five carnivals. That year, RAR claimed to have ninety affiliated groups.[1] By 1979, RAR had organised over two hundred gigs and thirteen local Carnivals. RAR's 1979 Militant Entertainment Tour, advertised with the image of a giant rhino and the slogan, 'Nazis are No Fun',[2] featured forty bands at twenty-three concerts, including the likes of the Ruts, the Specials and the Angelic Upstarts. The tour covered some 2,000 miles on the road beginning with Cambridge, Leicester, West Runton in deepest Norfolk[3] and culminated in a six-hour final show at Alexandra Palace. Given that nearly a quarter of million people attended just the first two Rock Against Racism Carnivals, it seems likely that between half a million and a million people altogether were involved in anti-racist activity, whether attending gigs or demonstrations, handing out leaflets or painting out graffiti.

Fifty Labour parties affiliated to the ANL, along with thirty AUEW branches, twenty-five trades councils, thirteen shop stewards' committees, eleven NUM lodges and similar numbers of branches from the TGWU, CPSA, TASS, NUJ, NUT and NUPE. By the end of the campaign, even Len Murray, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, could be heard addressing anti-fascist rallies in London's Brick Lane.[4]

Even those who did not support either Rock Against Racism or the ANL regard the campaign as a part of their history. A previous chapter described how Danny Reilly had responded to the League's formation with distrust, fearing that it would undermine existing anti-fascist networks which had been built with care. Speak to

him now and he defends the League: 'They made it fashionable to be Anti-Nazi.' David Landau was then a young Jewish anti-fascist, active in the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism. He thinks that the anti-racism of the ANL was too narrowly conceived and that its partisans were simply wrong to spend the years campaigning solely about the Front, rather than moving on to fight immigration controls. Yet faced with the argument that Thatcher beat the National Front, David springs to their defence: 'I don't buy the argument that Thatcher pulled the plug on the National Front. People have said that and belittled the role of the movement.'

To insist that protests worked offends against the accepted narrative of these years, which is that Margaret Thatcher, by pulling the Conservatives to the right, simultaneously defeated the Front while allowing its values to inform the policies of the 1980s, such as the British Nationality Act. In that story, racism continued without ever so much as skipping a beat. Indeed, that narrative is not altogether without substance. Five days before the May 1979 election, Mrs Thatcher took part in a phone-in programme on Radio 4. Challenged by one listener to withdraw her allegation that Britain was being 'swamped' by immigrants with alien cultures, the future Prime Minister refused to back down. 'Some people do feel swamped', she said, 'if streets they have lived in for their whole lives are really now quite, quite different.'

The press coverage of this exchange was enthusiastic with *The Sun* contrasting the 'twisted little men' of the Front with their 'jingoism and odious racialism' to the common sense of Tory proposals to reduce immigration. 'No reasonable person', *The Sun* concluded, 'could quarrel' with the Tories' plans to tighten immigration controls.[5] What was at stake in *The Sun*'s coverage was the interpretation of a mood of popular anti-NF sentiment which underpinned that party's defeat in 1979. It was possible to be an anti-Nazi, *The Sun* was suggesting, and vote Conservative in good faith. Indeed, if you were serious about stopping fascism, there was no better insurance than the Conservatives who, acting on their anti-Front instincts, would implement not all but just enough of the Front's proposals to satisfy their voters.

Yet those who explain the Front's decline solely in terms on the Tories' right turn on immigration cannot address the evidence that the Front had grown fastest in earlier periods precisely at the time when leaders of the Conservatives pushed themselves to the right. It was Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech that first dragged the NF into prominence and it was Conservative and press attacks on the Kenyan and Ugandan Asians that helped the NF in 1968 and again in 1972.

Indeed, the years since 1979 have seen countless examples of mainstream politicians in Britain and Europe seeking to outflank opponents to their right by promising to be 'realistic' about immigration or to allow a 'debate' about multiculturalism. More often than not, this move has failed with voters preferring parties which were consistent about their racism to ones which had adopted this politics only opportunistically. In the first decade of the new millennium, a Labour government was so frightened by the threat of the British National Party that Home Secretary David Blunkett insisted that the most authoritarian of anti-refugee policies were necessary to prevent what would

otherwise be civil war. In 2006, Jack Straw told the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* that he would not speak to his female Muslim constituents unless they removed their face veils and was backed by Prime Minister Tony Blair. None of these moves undercut the BNP which increased its number of elected councillors from forty-one before Straw's speech to fifty the year after. As the sociologist Cas Mudde observes, 'right-wing turns [by] mainstream parties, be they of the centre-left or of the centre-right, have at best only short-term success'.[6]

No doubt, centre-party emulation of a far-right party *can*, in the right circumstances, undermine it. But as ever in politics, timing is everything. If Thatcher's comments did hurt the Front, then they did so only because the far right was already in retreat. Thatcher's comments came after the Rock Against Racism campaign during which the National Front lost its potential audience among the young, and after anti-fascist opposition had made it impossible for the Front to hold meetings or public rallies and after its members had been demoralised by repeated protests. In a context where the Front was already demoralised and publicly despised, the Conservative pitch for its remaining votes had a high likelihood of success.

One way to see the politics of 1976–1982 might be as a cyclical phenomenon, in which a violent far right emerges every twenty-five years or so (in 1976–1979, 1993–1994 and 2007–2009 . . .) only to be confronted by the left which repeatedly and inevitably defeats it. The process might be difficult and arduous, but there is a path to victory and all we have to do is follow it. This, often enough, is what anti-fascists have told ourselves. In 1993, the British National Party's Derek Beackon was elected as a councillor at Tower Hamlets, a success which had always evaded the Front. The Anti-Nazi League was relaunched and together with other forces (*Searchlight* magazine, Anti-Fascist Action and many others) confronted the BNP in its East End base, with the result that Beackon lost his seat in 1994. This second wave of the Anti-Nazi League sought to rebuild a similar alliance to its 1970s precursor, inviting Sham 69's Jimmy Pursey to play at the Astoria and holding an Anti-Nazi League Carnival at Brockwell Park in 1993 with the Levellers playing.[7] For those who took part, it was easy to tell ourselves that this was a movement on the same scale as the events of this book. Yet the events of the 1990s were not the rebirth of a mass movement but lacked the creativity, the ambition, or the benign chaos of the original.

In the mid-2000s, I was for three years a member of the national steering committee of Unite Against Fascism, an alliance between the SWP and another small group Socialist Action, which attempted to replicate the model of 1970s anti-fascism but with less creativity than even that the ANL of the 1990s. I watched in dismay as the BNP won over fifty local councillors and two MEPs by 2009, before collapsing under the weight of its own incompetence, and the effect of competition from UKIP and the Conservatives. While there were a few areas where anti-fascists contributed heroically to the marginalisation of the BNP (Barking and Dagenham, Kent), they were the exception.

If recent years have shown that it is impossible to will a mass movement into being, that insight would have struck the 1970s generation as unremarkable. They

too had spent years waiting for the best moment to defeat the Front. As Dave Widgery writes, 'The ideas, the cultural ingredients, the potential had been there for years but they could only be utilised in a genuine crisis.'[8]

One of the reasons why anti-fascism has been a much narrower tradition since 1982 lies in part in the diminished importance of fascism within the broader camp of British racism. In 1976–1977, the Front were the leading component of a much broader move to the right, but ever since then, the dynamic forces have been elsewhere: the mainstream advocates of the 'hostile environment', the press and the Home Office. Anti-fascism has seemed less important to its potential audience.

The far left is in addition smaller and less rooted than it was. The campaigns of the last fifteen years have been in consequence less than the anti-fascism of the 1970s, their mere echo, conjuring the spirits and the names of past generations.

In his book, *Beating Time*, Dave Widgery sought to explain what it was about the relationship between RAR and the ANL, which caused the alliance to succeed. 'It was a piece of double time,' he wrote

> with the musical and the political confrontations on simultaneous but separate tracks and difficult to mix. The music came first and was more exciting. It provided the creative energy and the focus in what became a battle for the soul of young working-class England. But the direct confrontations and the hard-headed political organisation which underpinned them were decisive.[9]

Taken out of context, the final sentence might sound like a justification for emphasising political organisation at the expense of the cultural, but in fact Widgery was balancing three distinct terms: music came first (RAR) and was needed to make the campaign accessible to the millions of people who do not normally take an interest in politics. Then a combination of mass physical confrontation (Lewisham) and left-wing organisation (the Anti-Nazi League) was used to consolidate this breakthrough. All of these parts were needed.

There is unlikely to be any return to the anti-fascism of the 1970s, with its youth, its scepticism of authority and its physical daring, without their prerequisite: an independent cultural movement following its own rules.

The campaign of the 1970s occurred in a particular moment in British history. After 1945, there had been twenty years in which the population changed as a result of Commonwealth migration. Initially, as we have seen, there were almost no legal restrictions to the practice of free movement. Yet from the early 1960s, increasing obstacles were put in the path of prospective migrants, so that by the time of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech, there was already in principle no new migration to Britain from India, Pakistan, or the Caribbean. The groups which did arrive after 1968 – the Asians from Kenya, Uganda and Malawi – were refugees and British passport holders. Each new migration of this kind was met by moves attempted to prevent its repetition. Even after Britain had become, in principle, a locked gate to new arrivals, anti-migrant sentiment did not dissipate but seemed with the Front to have acquired a coherent, electoral, expression.

If even closing the door to all new black arrivals was insufficient to satisfy the popular demand for restriction, what else could be done to meet the demand for further anti-migrant measures? Enoch Powell found an answer which satisfied him: he decided that the state should now repatriate the remaining unwelcome black migrants. This was also the National Front's solution; indeed, it argued the same politics without the Conservatives' equivocation.

No politician, neither Heath nor Wilson nor Callaghan, had a clear alternative to endlessly increased immigration controls and ultimately repatriation. But what Rock Against Racism and other anti-fascists showed was that the phenomenon of anti-migrant hostility would not continue indefinitely but was a decreasing force, especially among the integrated generation of Britain's youth.

In 1976–1982, an anti-fascist campaign of unprecedented popularity won a temporary victory over the gathering forces of both popular and state racism. Of course, racial prejudice was not vanquished. 'We didn't stop racial attacks,' Dave Widgery writes, 'far less racism.'[10] And yet . . . a space was found in which millions of people could breathe. A marker was put down that the struggles against racism and fascism are causes capable of moving hundreds of thousands of people.

If the movements this book has described are ever to find a genuine successor, it will be through the discovery of new ways of cultural organising, capable of challenging the new nostalgia for the imperial past. It will come from a generation attuned to the anti-fascist legacy, who assimilate it and surpass what went before.

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