

Killing the Nazi menace

how to stop the fascists

A Socialist Workers
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Chris Bambery

Killing the Nazi menace: how to stop the fascists /

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Killing the Nazi menace: how to stop the fascists

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From the sewers of history

THE PERIL of Nazism once more stalks the streets of Europe, within living memory of Hitler's Holocaust.

In eastern Germany Nazi thugs were confident enough to firebomb a refugee hostel in broad daylight at the town of Hoyerswerda. In the 1989 West German elections the Nazi-run Republikaner Party gained two million votes. Two years later the fascists got eight percent of the vote in the city of Bremen.

In France, Europe's top Nazi, Jean-Marie Le Pen, claims his National Front has 100,000 members. Le Pen described the Holocaust as a 'detail of history'—and still his fascists got over four million votes in the 1989 elections. In 1990 Jewish cemeteries were attacked, in particular at Carpentras in southern France, the very region in which Le Pen has chosen to build his personal power base.

An October 1991 opinion poll showed 38 percent agreed with the National Front's policy on immigration. Yet these are the very policies of the wartime Vichy government which rounded up Jews and handed them to Hitler's SS and the death camps. Le Pen even demands 'rafles' for Arabs and Blacks in France—the term used by the Vichy authorities for the rounding up of Jews. The NF paper *Présent* calls for 'concentration camps' for immigrants.

Elsewhere, Nazi parties have made breakthroughs

in Austria, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland and Scandinavia. John Tyndall's fascists in the still small British National Party hope to emulate such success here. In Eastern Europe and in the former USSR anti-semitism is re-emerging from the ashes of Stalinism.

The tide of Nazism has gained alarming momentum.

Yet this is not inevitable, or unstoppable. Le Pen could have been, and can be, stopped. The wave of support for Nazis across Europe can be thrown back.

Many millions of people want to crush the Nazi menace. To do this we need first to grasp the circumstances which have allowed them to gain a foothold and to understand how we can reverse their growth.



Hitler's victims—now we face the threat of fascism again

What is fascism?

1.

The ultimate barbarism

THE LAST time fascism took hold of an advanced industrialised state, it led to Hitler's Holocaust.

Six million Jews were slain by the Nazis. Two and a half million Poles were exterminated; 520,000 Gypsies and 473,000 Russian prisoners were murdered; 100,000 'inferior' people were done to death because they were mentally ill or physically disabled; tens of thousands of socialists, communists, gays and other 'unhealthy elements' were killed.

The Nazis started out on the road to this slaughter by talking about repatriating Jews. Today Le Pen and Tyndall aim to set off on the same bloody trail by calling for the expulsion of non-white people from France and Britain. We know the end result from history. The head of Hitler's terror police, the SS, boasted:

I have emptied the largest Jewish ghettos in the area... By the end of the year the Jewish question will have been settled in all the occupied countries. Only a few individual Jews who have managed to slip through the net will be left. Then we shall set about tackling the problem of the non-Jewish partner in mixed marriages and the problem of the half-Jew systematically and sensibly, and we shall find a solution and put it into effect...

All of us have asked ourselves what about the women and children? I have decided that this too requires a clear answer. I do not consider that I should be justified

in getting rid of the men—in having them put to death, in other words—only to allow their children to grow up to avenge themselves on our sons and grandsons.

We have to make up our minds, hard though it may be, that this race must be wiped off the face of the earth.

Just translate these terrible words to Britain today. It would mean the extermination of all black people, all Jews. It would mean the wiping out of anyone married to a black person or a Jew, anyone who had a relationship with a black person or a Jew and any child which resulted from that.

The whole of society was reduced to the level of the barracks. 'There are no private lives,' declared the Nazi in charge of the labour force. 'The peoples,' he stated 'and the individual human beings within each people are like children. The politician must supervise everything'. The Nazis decided who could be born or not, who could marry and who could not, who could have children and who could not. Tens of thousands of 'unhealthy' people were sterilised or castrated. The Nazi slogan for women was simple—'Children, Kitchen, Church'.

Any independent or voluntary organisation which did not fit such rigid centralisation was outlawed—from the YMCA to the Boy Scouts. Any ideas which were slightly different were suppressed—not just socialist ideas but also those of religious groups or scientists.

But fascism is not just an assault on minorities, it is a wholesale attack on the vast bulk of society—the working class. In Italy, Mussolini's fascists seized power in 1922 to put an end to years of working class insurgency. In Germany too, fascism's objective was to snuff out working class resistance.

Within two years of Hitler's victory, wages were slashed by up to 40 percent. Workers' leaders and officials were arrested, tortured and murdered, their property confiscated.

This is terror on the highest scale. But fascism is more than this, it is distinguished from other forms of dictatorship by its aims and methods.

Fascism can take off when the bosses feel compelled to

completely destroy, to atomise, working class organisation. They can't do this by the usual methods of other police states. In Britain, for example, 200,000 soldiers and 120,000 police would not be enough to overcome and disperse every last bit of resistance from 23 million workers. Fascism, therefore, relies on a *mass* movement within society to smash the working class. Such movements, as we shall see, have largely been recruited from the middle class. As the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky put it,

the historic function of fascism is to smash the working class, destroy its organisations, and stifle political liberties when the capitalists find themselves unable to govern and dominate with the help of democratic machinery.

Today the grotesque images of the dead and dying of Auschwitz are etched onto most people's minds. Little wonder, then, that fascism is often seen as a form of madness which sweeps whole nations before it. But it is more than that, it has a perverse logic of its own. It is thrown up and carried forward by the failings of capitalism itself.

A battering ram against the working class

FASCISM HAS never 'crept up' on society. It has only ever been successful by storming in at periods of profound social crisis.

Fascist movements can come to power under two conditions. The first is that the bosses—the owners of large industry, the judges, the army chiefs—are in despair. They are so desperate that they will abandon the relative stability of their normal form of rule to risk throwing in their lot with ideologically crazed thugs. The second condition is that the fascists themselves have already proved capable of being of use to the bosses. For this they need to have welded together an organisation with the strength to terrorise a weakened or divided working class.

There's no doubt most bosses will make such a choice, if

necessary. After all, that is precisely what happened in the 1930s. Hitler took power after the major industrialists and bankers cynically decided to throw their weight behind him. In Spain, when Franco rose against a democratically elected government, the Catholic Church pronounced his cause a crusade.

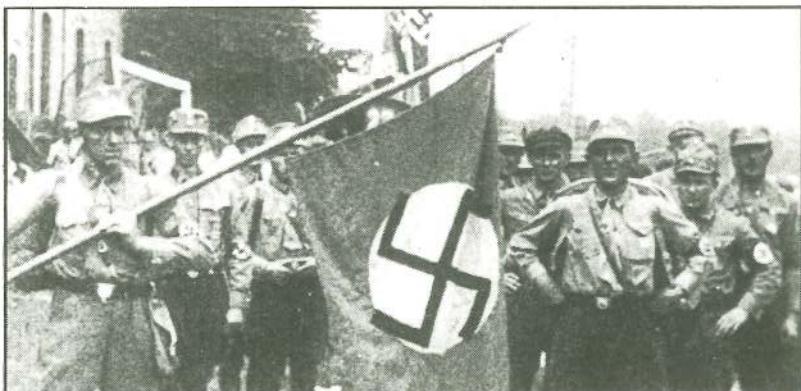
The establishment chose fascism because capitalism had staggered out of the First World War to find itself besieged by revolution and recession. Three empires were torn up. In Russia the workers took power. In Germany they nearly followed in 1919 and 1923. In Hungary a workers' republic had to be overthrown by French arms. In Italy the factories were occupied by armed workers. The world returned to deep crisis in the early 1930s. Once more, the spectre of revolution haunted industrialists and bankers. They knew they could not rely on their armies. Even if they were immune to the class conflict around them, there just weren't enough soldiers to suppress every factory and street.

Hitler's thugs, however, had amassed enough strength by 1933 to claim to be up to the job of wiping out the threat of the working class. He could boast 400,000 Storm Troopers, ready to move against any opposition. How had he done it?

The 1929 Wall Street Crash heralded the deepest slump in history. Europe's middle classes suddenly found their world collapsing around them.

They were not the only ones to suffer. The working class too was hammered by the depression. But workers had trade unions, and a tradition of battling against their bosses. They were hit by depression, but they had at least the possibility of an answer to it in the form of collective struggle and organisation.

The middle classes were in a different position. They had no tradition of collective solidarity. They didn't have the possibility of waging any real fight against the big bosses. If the working class was on the offensive, and showing the possibility of building something different altogether, then the bulk of the middle class might have fallen in behind them. This was not the situation in Germany, however. The working class was fighting defensively. Its parties failed to



The middle class rallied around the Nazi flag

inspire: the Social Democrats were exposed in government; the Communists held up Stalin's Russia as a model.

There was a vacuum in such a desperate *milieu*. Demagogues like Hitler and Mussolini moved to fill it and gather round large numbers of despairing middle class people. They could offer simple answers in a world gone crazy. Jewish international financiers and Jewish Communists, they said, were conspiring to destroy society; workers were greedy; trade unions were led by 'Marxists'. The fascist leaders latched on to national grievances in order to give their followers a sense of purpose.

The fascist leaders claimed to champion 'the little man'—the small businessman, the doctor, the lawyer, the soldier fallen on hard times, 'decent people' sucked into the mire. From the depths of despair they seemed to lift the middle class—the petty bourgeoisie—to its feet, to give it a banner around which to rally.

As the Nazis formed their combat groups from such 'human dust'—to use the term employed by Trotsky—the capitalist class began to see the new, mass fascist movements as their saviour. They could deploy this new force to destroy working class organisation and restore their profits.

As Trotsky described it, the fascists',

political art consisted in fusing the petty bourgeoisie into oneness through its solid hostility to the

proletariat. What must be done in order to improve things? First of all, throttle those who are underneath. Impotent before large capital, the petty bourgeoisie hopes in the future to regain its social dignity by overwhelming the workers.

But once in power, fascism serves only the interests of big business:

German fascism, like the Italian, raised itself to power on the backs of the petty bourgeoisie, which it turned into a battering ram against the working class and the institutions of democracy. But fascism in power is least of all the rule of the petty bourgeoisie. On the contrary, it is the most ruthless dictatorship of monopolist capital. Mussolini is right: the intermediate classes are incapable of independent policies. During periods of great crisis they are called upon to reduce to absurdity the policies of one of the two basic classes. Fascism succeeded in placing them at the service of capital.

But to get to this position, where a fascist movement is of use to the bosses, it must have already proved itself as a terror organisation. This is why the street and street power is crucial for the fascists. They can't call on the sort of collective power workers have within the factory. The strike is absent from their armory. Rather they must create a seemingly invincible army of terror to control whole areas of cities.

Hitler grasped this from the start. 'Mass demonstrations', he wrote, 'must burn into the little man's soul the conviction that though a little worm he is part of a great dragon'. The Nazi propaganda chief Goebbels said: 'Whoever controls the streets also conquers the masses, and whoever conquers the masses thereby conquers the state'.

Big business did not like placing its fortunes with a former house painter like Hitler, but he promised to destroy the Communists, the trade unions and the Social Democratic Party (Germany's Labour Party). Big business was driven towards this solution by the depth of its despair.

Therefore, fascism is a mass movement, based primarily around the middle class, which seeks to smash all forms of opposition, and works ultimately in the interests of big business. It is a cancer which weakens and demoralises the working class as it grows, proving fatal in the final instance.

A number of points follow. The first is that, if successful, fascism represents an unsurpassed disaster for the vast majority of the population. Even under Tory rule, indeed under much more dictatorial regimes than we have known in modern Britain, people can still fight, they can still organise at least the barest forms of defence. Under fascism, all organisation, all resistance, is wiped out for years if not decades.

Secondly, free speech, and other aspects of democracy which we have been able to win, cannot possibly be defended by allowing Nazis the right to free speech. The charge that is often thrown at those who seek effectively to oppose the Nazis—that it would be better to defeat them through reasonable debate—is completely wrong. For a start, Nazis gain power through *terror*, not through force of argument. And, if they do gain power, then *all* free speech, *all* forms of democracy will be at an end. That is why socialists, who are whole-heartedly for free speech and open debate, say Nazis must be silenced to safeguard it.

The third crucial thing that flows from the nature of fascist movements is that direct confrontation with them on the streets is absolutely necessary. As we have seen, Hitler's Nazis regarded control of the streets as essential. Militaristic marches, drums beating, serve two functions for fascists. One is that, unopposed, they terrorise into silence those people who don't agree with them. The other is that being part of a powerful-looking street movement is the only way in which the unemployed, the middle classes and other marginal elements of society can be convinced that they are part of something important.

They can't feel part of a 'great dragon' if they are repeatedly driven from the streets.

Another key element of any fight follows from this. The only way to oppose the Nazis effectively is by building *united*

action against them by as many people as possible.

This means steering clear of two dangers. One is to say that we must avoid any action which would put off those people, such as wet Tory MPs or 'liberal' bosses, who may say they deplore fascism, but who will always shy away from confronting the Nazis. In any case, past experience shows that such people would ultimately prefer the Nazis to a working class victory. The left often fell into this trap in the 1930s, particularly in Spain; of building Broad Democratic Alliances, or Popular Fronts. The opposite danger, however, is to say that the mass of the working class, who at present follow the likes of Neil Kinnock and Norman Willis, are useless because their leaders are themselves reluctant to wage any real battle. This, as we shall see, was the disastrous policy followed by the Communist Party in Germany.

Instead, a mass anti-Nazi movement is needed which leads wide layers of people in real struggle against the fascists. Just as the Nazis feed off division and passivity, we need to oppose them through unity and activity. This is what is meant by the United Front.

Such unity is made possible by the very nature of the fascist threat. When the shock troops of fascism were unleashed in the 1930s, their victims were not simply the far left. All working class organisations had to be destroyed, even those which had loyally backed the status quo. The German equivalents of Neil Kinnock and Norman Willis were thrown into the concentration camps. The working class was driven apart, disorganised and terrorised.

Of course many leaders of the Labour Party and the unions habitually duck most struggles, even if it is in their interests at times to fight. But the scale of the threat to all minorities, to all workers, to the mass of society by a movement which ended last time in the gas chambers, means that it is possible to rally these people in opposition—if the right things are done. We have a wealth of historical experience, good and bad, to draw on.

Two wrong roads

2.

Germany—defeat through division

NAZISM IS often presented as part of the German national character. This is a racist myth in itself. It also blinds us to the fact that Hitler was never elected with the support of the German working class. They themselves were among his first and major victims.

Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany in 1933 by President Hindenburg. In elections just weeks before, the overall votes of the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party topped that of the Nazis.

Even after Hitler came to power in January 1933 and launched a wave of terror across Germany, the Social Democrats (SPD) could still poll seven million votes and the Communists four and a half million. The trade unions remained relatively immune to the Nazis. In March 1933 Nazi candidates got just three percent of the vote in elections for factory committees.

This was not surprising. The violence, the organisation and the techniques employed by the Nazis, the support they received from the German ruling class, the army and police are all tribute to the strength of the German working class and the power needed to destroy its organisations. Nevertheless, the Nazis were still able to rise on the backs of both economic desperation and the failure of the left parties to lead an effective struggle.

In 1928 the SPD had nine million votes, 900,000 members and five million affiliated trade unionists. The Communists

could boast three million votes. At this stage the Nazis had just two and a half percent of the vote.

A year later Germany was swept into economic collapse. By 1931 three million were on the dole. Whole sections of the middle class found themselves out on the streets. The Social Democrats, who had been in a coalition government with various liberal parties, seemed to be responsible for much of this. The traditional liberal parties of the middle classes offered no way out.

Political ideas which had seemed the property of far right cranks now assumed gigantic proportions. The myth was created that Jewish bankers were responsible for the crisis. Blame was placed on the division of the old German Empire after the First World War. Hitler seized on both issues to win sweeping support. The Nazis also attracted sections of unorganised workers and the unemployed who were desperate for any apparent solution.

The disaffection with the ruling SPD was shown in the September 1930 election. The Communists increased their vote by a third to 4,600,000. But this was dwarfed by the sudden and chilling success of the Nazis. From nowhere, their vote mushroomed by 800 percent to 6,400,000.

The roots of this success lay in two failures on the part of the left wing parties. The first was the refusal of the Social Democratic Party to face up to the Nazis.

The Social Democratic Party was—like the British Labour Party—totally committed to working through parliament and the existing state institutions. It denounced the idea that change came from below through the struggles in the workplace or on the streets. Indeed, when it was in government in 1919 it had bloodily suppressed the revolution which had ended the war and toppled the German Emperor. It had allied with many of those who would be central to the future Nazi party in gunning down workers and murdering the leaders of the infant Communist Party.

Now the SPD leaders' concern for the republic stopped them fighting the fascists. They had their own large military formation, the Reischbanners, and were in control of the government of Prussia, the largest state in Germany. But

this position did nothing to address the economic woes of the mass of the population. Moreover, when it came to the crunch, this seemingly impressive force just melted away.

When the reactionary Field Marshal Hindenberg was nominated to stand for president, the SPD leaders backed him as a lesser evil to Hitler. As tension built in 1932, the central government unconstitutionally pushed the SPD out of office in Prussia. Yet, while workers prepared to oppose the move with a general strike and Communists and others fought the Nazis on the streets, neither the SPD-controlled police, nor the Reichsbanner were mobilised. They were allowed to just fade away.

At the start of 1933, the SPD leaders even accepted Hitler's appointment, and the end of all democracy, on the grounds that it was 'constitutional'!

The strategy of the Communist Party, on the other hand, made impossible unity between the millions of workers who supported both the two main left parties.

First, the Communist Party completely understated the impending disaster. They heralded the 1930 elections as a triumph for themselves. The Communist Party's daily paper announced the next day that: 'Last night was Herr Hitler's greatest day, but the so-called election victory of the Nazis is the beginning of the end.'

Yet by 1931 the Nazis were employing 100,000 Storm Troopers on the streets. Already key sections of the ruling class like the coal baron Kirdorf and the steel magnate Thyssen were funding them. Sections of the army were flirting with Hitler.

The Communists' second mistake was to brand the Social Democrats and not the Nazis as the main enemy. Indeed they called the Social Democrats 'social fascists'.

This was a disastrous policy. It erected a massive wall between the most militant German workers around the Communist Party and the larger number of workers who identified with the Social Democrats. Many of these were unhappy with their leadership. The Social Democrat leaders argued workers should rely on the law and the police to stop the Nazis. Yet this was shown to come to nothing in Prussia,

where Storm Troopers roamed the streets and the government was blown away by decree. But the Communists could not reach these broad layers of people who wanted to fight, as they expended so much energy denouncing the Social Democrats rather than the Nazis.

Trotsky argued that, while the record of the Social Democrat leaders was rotten, they themselves were on the Nazis hitlist. Secondly, their supporters wanted a lead in the fight against Hitler. That meant it was possible to force the Social Democrats to take action.

What followed from this was a strategy for uniting all those who wanted to resist the Nazis—the United Front. In Trotsky's words: 'the policy of the United Front has as its task to separate those who want to fight from those who do not'. He warned:

At present the strength of the National Socialists lies not so much in their own army as in the schism within the army of their mortal enemy. But it is precisely the reality of the fascist threat, its growth and proximity, the consciousness of the necessity of averting it at any cost, that must inevitably push the workers towards unity in the name of self defence.

That did not mean burying differences between those who wanted to reform the system and those who wanted to topple it. It did mean agreeing on specific actions whilst continuing to argue their positions. Trotsky summed it up:

March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to strike, whom to strike and when to strike.

Far from following such a policy, the Communist Party continued to direct its fire at the 'social fascists'. That reached grotesque heights in 1931 when Communists backed the Nazis' campaign for a referendum across Prussia to remove the Social Democratic government.

By 1932 eight million Germans were unemployed. A third of the urban population were on the dole. Real wages had fallen by a third. The Nazis now had 400,000 Storm Troopers.



British fascist Mosley—he was stopped by united action

These were given a free hand to spread their terror. The Communist Party did mobilise to resist them but it relied only on its own members and supporters.

In Prussia alone there were 461 riots in June and July of 1932. 82 people died and 400 were seriously injured. There's no doubting the heroism of individual Communists—30 party members were killed. Hitler's propaganda chief, Goebbels, was regularly chased from working class districts by the Communists. Yet they could offer no lead to the bulk of workers and found themselves outmatched in street fighting in which the police systematically backed the Nazis.

Trotsky pointed to another road, contrasting the social base of the Nazis to that of the left:

The main army of Fascism still consists of the petty bourgeoisie and the new middle class... On the scales of election statistics, one thousand Fascist votes weigh as much as a thousand Communist votes...

But on the scale of revolutionary struggle a thousand workers in one big factory represent a force a hundred times greater... The great bulk of the Fascists consists of human rubbish.

There was no test of this collective power of German

workers against the Nazi bands. Yet German workers showed repeatedly they were only waiting for a clear lead to confront Hitler. At the close of January 1933, Hitler's coup,

brought out what were in fact the most impressive demonstrations of the German workers' will to resist. In the afternoon and evening of 30 January spontaneous and violent mass demonstrations took place in German cities. Delegations from the factories... from all parts of the country arrived on the same day in Berlin in expectation of battle orders.

None came. The Social Democrats accepted Hitler had come to power 'legally'. The Communist leaders' sense of reality was little better. They argued Hitler would last a short time and then they would come to power—'After Hitler Us'—as thousands of Communists were dragged off to the concentration camps.

Hitler's victory was delivered through the failure of the left. The strongest working class movement in Europe was never mobilised for battle. The price could not have been higher.

Spain, defeat through paralysis

IF GERMANY was the signal for despair, the Spanish Civil War which erupted three years later was a sign of hope. Here was a chance to stop fascism before it engulfed the world in war and mass murder.

Unity became the watchword across the globe. However, the mistaken path of the German left in failing to unite in action, was now turned full circle. Unity was to be achieved with *everyone*, even politicians of the middle and ruling classes, and this even at the cost of making sure that effective action could not take place. This led the Spanish Communist Party back to essentially the position of the German Social Democrats: do nothing to threaten the status quo, don't even lead militant struggle for fear of losing respectability.

A Popular Front government was elected in February

1936, made up of two liberal parties, the two main Catalan nationalist parties, the Basque Nationalist Party, the Socialists, the Communists and the main trade union federation.

They all agreed to oppose fascism—but also to the defence of the Spanish Republic and the existing social order. Socialism was ruled off the agenda.

But Spain in 1936 was polarising along very clear class lines. Until 1931 it had been ruled by a monarchy which favoured military dictatorship. That was swept out in a wave of popular enthusiasm. Strikes, popular uprisings and failed coup attempts marked the years that followed. The ruling and middle classes looked to the army and to fascist Germany and Italy for salvation. It was clear by July 1936 that either the left or the right would have to act.

General Franco took the initiative for the right. After seizing the Spanish colony of Morocco, his troops crossed into Spain. Military garrisons, backed by local fascists, rose up across the country.

In Madrid the government refused to confirm the rising was happening—even after the working class of Spain's third city Seville were butchered. The respectable Republican politicians who led the Popular Front hoped to come to terms with the generals.

From the first, the Spanish working class took the lead against the uprising, defeating it in five of the seven biggest cities. In Barcelona, matters went further. Anarchist and left wing militias took control of the city. Factories were taken over by workers. Armed workers patrolled the streets.

Columns moved from the city into neighbouring Aragon, winning popular support when they gave land to the peasants in the one successful Republican offensive of the war.

This resistance meant Franco's crusade could not be just another military coup—bloody as those can be. He had to take over and use the Spanish fascist party, the Falange; he had to use the language and the techniques of German and Italian fascism.

Fascism in Spain aimed at more than the destruction of

the working class. It also attacked anyone who did not rally to its narrow, clerical vision. That included even sections of the ruling class such as the industrialists of Catalonia and the Basque Country. It included Jews and Freemasons. It meant killing any idea of sexual freedom or freedom for Spain's many nations.

Faced with this, the central Republican government in Madrid clung to the Popular Front strategy of maintaining an alliance between the left and liberal politicians. This way, they hoped to prevent the middle classes or even sections of the ruling class siding with fascism.

But to achieve this strategy, the Madrid government had to damp down a developing revolution in order to reassure the upper classes and do nothing to upset the two major European democracies, France and Britain.

This meant throwing away opportunity after opportunity. Franco's rebellion started in Morocco, which had fought long and hard for its independence. Yet the Madrid government would not declare it independent because of the effects this might have within French and British colonies.

When Britain and France suggested the European powers agree not to aid either side, Madrid accepted. Neither power provided arms and blocked supplies reaching the Republic. Yet Germany and Italy, which also signed the non-intervention pact, poured in arms and men.

Within fascist-occupied territory the Madrid government would not offer the peasants land—a move which would have eroded Franco's base. Such moves, it was argued, would scare away the middle classes.

Finally, the best arms and units were turned away from the fascists and against workers' power in Barcelona.

In May 1937 security forces moved to take control of the telephone exchange. They were repelled and a week of street fighting followed. The anarchists and other left wingers who opposed the Communist Party could have taken over the city—yet they refused to do so. Their leaders also accepted they must maintain the Madrid government at all costs. The barricades came down, government forces entered the city and ordered a reign of terror.

The civil war continued until the beginning of 1939. But the Republic fought a conventional military struggle which they could not win. The inspiration of workers' power was lost, sacrificed to the Popular Front strategy. With class struggle cut out of the equation, Italian and German arms tipped the balance in Franco's favour.

The lesson was simple. The power of the working class had thrown back fascism at the beginning and had taken the offensive against it. But this power was subordinated to the need to maintain unity with liberal politicians. The price paid was that Franco ruled Spain until 1975.

Two great, unnecessary defeats were ceded to the fascists in the 1930s. In Germany division led to paralysis. In Spain paralysis came from the search for respectability.



Workers' mobilisation, the squandered hope of Spain

3.

Unity in action— when the Nazis were beaten

Blocked at Cable Street

BRITAIN SEEMED the exception in Europe by the late 1930s. Fascism had swept the board in Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal. Eastern Europe was largely run by right wing dictators. In France a powerful fascist movement had attacked the parliament and forced a change of government in 1934 and would collaborate with the German invaders in 1940. This was not because fascism was somehow 'un-British'. Rather, it was averted by two special factors.

For a start, the crisis which shook the world economy in the 1930s did not hit Britain as hard as its European rivals. The blow was cushioned by the reserves of the empire. Unemployment was certainly severe, reaching three million, and industrial production fell by 16 percent. Yet it was not as catastrophic as the slump which hit Germany.

This did not stop fascism gaining a threatening presence in Britain. Nor did it prevent sections of the ruling class flirting with it. Winston Churchill expressed his admiration for Hitler and Mussolini. The Duke of Windsor, formerly King Edward VIII, visited Hitler and was openly pro-Nazi.

A British fascist movement was led by Sir Oswald Mosley, an aristocrat who had been an MP on both the Tory and Labour benches. He launched the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1933 and his supporters paraded in black shirts.

The BUF's membership was heavily middle class. Mosley targeted shopkeepers, farmers and small traders. A local Labour Party in Surrey reported that '75 percent of local

fascists are young men and women of independent means'.

Mosley was confident he could attract wide support from the Tory right, industrialists and financiers. The best known of these was Lord Rothermere, owner of the **Daily Mail**. In January 1934 Rothermere signed an editorial headlined 'Hurrah For The Blackshirts'.

What stopped such support growing and made Britain an exception was the nature of the struggle against it.

As in other countries, the response of the leaders of the British labour movement was to bury their heads in the sand. The Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress issued a statement entitled 'Democracy and Dictatorship' which even-handedly denounced both the 'iron Dictatorship of Capitalism and Nationalism' and the 'Dictatorship of the working class'. After this they settled down to doing nothing.

Credit for the defeat of Mosley must go to those who ignored such passivity and fought fascism on the streets.

The small Communist Party, with just 6,000 members, stepped in to fill the vacuum left by the official labour movement's refusal to confront Mosley. The CP were officially driven by the same mistaken theories which had led to disaster in Germany then Spain. However, a combination of circumstances meant that *in practice* they followed a much better strategy in spite of themselves. Pressure from below, both inside and outside the party demanded real action. If they had ignored it, action would have taken place without them, activity which they could not afford to miss. Paradoxically, the British CP did not deliver a disaster, because it was *too weak* to stifle this demand.

On 7 June 1934 Mosley staged a monster rally at Olympia in London. The Communist Party mobilised to disrupt it. Uniformed Blackshirts viciously beat hecklers inside the hall. The police refused to intervene, though they did arrest many of the 5,000 demonstrating outside.

True to form, just two days after Olympia the Labour paper the **Daily Herald** published a letter from the Labour MP for North Hammersmith which argued:

The Communists, by smashing Blackshirt meetings, are

as usual, aiding the fascists, and gaining public sympathy for them. We of the Labour Party do not fear the effect of Mosley's speeches. In any event, let them be heard, for free speech is still precious today, although the Communists are such opponents of it.

Yet Olympia was a turning point in the BUF's fortunes. Supporters like Lord Rothermere now backed off. And the experience of Olympia had a radicalising effect on those who wanted to stop Mosley. It was an eye-opener to the real nature of the fascists and the way in which they could be sure of police backing.

Mosley was intent on recouping the situation. He followed Olympia by announcing a mass rally in London's Hyde Park in September 1934. The Co-ordinating Committee for Anti Fascist Activities, an alliance of Communists and other left wingers, announced a counter-demonstration. Again, the Labour leadership, the general secretary of the TUC, the London Trades Council and the *Daily Herald* all told workers to boycott any such protest against the Blackshirts.

The Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party threw themselves into building the biggest demonstration in defiance of officialdom. Up to 100,000 anti-fascists surrounded a few thousand Blackshirts who cowered behind 7,000 police for protection.

The BUF got a derisory vote in the 1935 general election. Hopes of support from big business were still-born. Mosley now changed course and concentrated his hopes on building a stronghold of fascist support in one area—the East End of London.

The East End was a concentration of deep poverty. Housing was atrocious. Industry was dominated by small sweatshops. Trade union organisation was poor. Casual labour was common. Unemployment was high.

The East End was also where Jewish immigrants fleeing pogroms in eastern Europe and Nazism in Germany had clustered. Mosley turned on them as scapegoats for the East End's poverty. All of Hitler's lies and hysteria were repeated.

East Enders were told: 'The big Jew puts you out of employment by the million, the little Jew sweats you in Whitechapel'. Blackshirts held hundreds of open air meetings and rallies in the area. Blackshirts marched through Jewish areas chanting 'The Yids, the Yids, We've Got To Get Rid of the Yids!'. Physical attacks mounted on Jews and their property. Sections of the unemployed, driven desperate by their living conditions, were attracted by this mixture of racism and violence.

The authorities tolerated Blackshirt violence and race hatred while anti fascists were subject to arrest.

The leaders of the labour movement did nothing about the Blackshirt menace. Again it was left to the Communist Party and Independent Labour Party to meet the challenge. The official leaders of the Jewish community also failed to mobilise, but sections of Jewish ex-servicemen and youth joined in confronting the Blackshirts.

Events reached a climax when Mosley announced a march through the heart of the East End on 4 October 1936. The Home Secretary refused to ban it. The Jewish Ex-Serviceman's Association and the Independent Labour Party called a counter-demonstration.

Initially, the Communist Party did not want to mobilise. It was directing its energies into constructing a Popular Front with all sorts of Liberals, Tories and clergymen. Involvement in street clashes with the fascists was becoming embarrassing to such respectable allies.

In the event the Communist Party leadership could not hold this line. With or without the party there would have been massive protests against the Blackshirt march. With three days to go the Communist Party threw its energies into building the counter-demonstration. The Labour Party leadership, the Jewish Board of Deputies, East London mayors and various rabbis and clergymen urged a boycott.

A hundred thousand workers ignored their advice. They rallied near the Blackshirts' assembly point under the slogan 'They Shall Not Pass'—echoing that of Madrid under siege by Franco.

Their forces were distributed so that the fascists and

their police protectors would be channelled down Cable Street—the easiest street to defend, being narrow with many side alleys. Loudspeaker vans, motorcycle messengers and first aid posts were all organised.

The advertised route of the fascist march was blocked by a massive crowd near its assembly point. As had become usual, the police tried to clear the route, launching baton charge after baton charge. Phil Piratin, a Stepney Communist leader, tells how the battle developed:

It was obvious that the fascists and the police would now turn their attention to Cable Street. We were ready. The moment this became apparent the signal was given to put up the barricades.

A lorry was overturned,

supplemented by bits of old furniture, mattresses, and every kind of thing you expect to find in box-rooms, it was a barricade which the police did not find easy to penetrate. As they charged they were met with milk bottles, stones and marbles. Some of the housewives began to drop milk bottles from the roof tops. A number of police surrendered.

After this the police simply called off the fascist march. Mosley had been stopped. Piratin wrote:

In Stepney nothing had changed physically. The poor houses, the mean streets, the ill-conditioned workshops were the same, but the people were changed. Their heads seemed higher, and their shoulders were squarer—and the stories they told! Each one was a 'hero'—many of them were...

The 'terror' had lost its meaning. The people now knew that fascism could be defeated if they organised themselves to do so.

Labour leaders denounced the anti fascist protesters, praising the police. They placed all their energies into pushing the Public Order Act through parliament.

The Act banned the fascists from parading in their black

shirts and uniforms. The police had wide powers to ban demonstrations. Yet it was consistently aimed more at the left than at the Mosleyites. Shortly after its passing, three anti fascists were sentenced to four months hard labour under its terms. Fascist marches consistently got the green light to proceed while blanket bans were pushed through against trade union May Day marches.

Such legislation did not stop the fascists. In Germany both the Brownshirts' uniform and the Storm Troopers were banned for a period. It did not stop them. Mass mobilisations like Cable Street stopped Mosley.

After Cable Street the anti fascists could now go on the offensive. The bulk of the BUF was always a middle class organisation, but in the misery of the East End it attracted a pool of working class support through its racist arguments. Even after Cable Street, in 1937 BUF candidates got 23.17 percent of the vote in Bethnal Green and 16.3 percent in Limehouse. These were solidly working class areas.

Another tack was needed to undermine such support. While it was necessary to physically confront the hard core Blackshirts, other tactics were needed to break away their supporters. This was done by leading an alternative, real struggle against unemployment and bad housing. Piratin describes a turning point in June 1937:

Paragon Mansions should have been condemned by the local authority 40 years before, but it was still there. People were living there, raising families and landlords were taking the most exorbitant rents possible for these slums. We had been canvassing and selling the **Daily Worker**. A committee of tenants had been formed, which won the sympathy and support of some public spirited local citizens...

One day we were told that two of the families were to be evicted the next day. In one family there were five children, and in the other six. I was curious to know why these people themselves had done nothing in the matter, and why they had not referred the matter to the Tenants Committee. I discovered that in both cases they

were members of the BUF and obviously wanted no truck with us. One family would have nothing to do with us whatsoever that evening. The other was prepared to listen.

The two homes were defended from the bailiffs, in the course of which it was discovered the families had asked the BUF for help but they had refused to do anything.

The news [of the victory] went around very quickly, the barricades came down and the 'ammunition' was disposed of. The lessons did not require being pressed home. BUF membership cards were destroyed voluntarily and in disgust.

The Communists organised a massive housing campaign in the East End which eroded Mosley's support.

The lessons from the experience of the struggle in the East End are rich. At the height of recession fascists seized on working people's grievances and bitterness to gain support.

The two facets of the successful anti-fascist mobilisation—the mass action to smash the Nazi marches and mass activity to isolate them from working class support—needs repeating today.

Stopping the National Front

I believe our great marches, with drums and flags and banners, have a hypnotic effect on the public and immense effect in solidifying the allegiance of our followers so that their enthusiasm can be sustained.

Those were the words of John Tyndall, Fuhrer of the British National Front in the 1970s. Today Tyndall is leader of the Nazi British National Party. His words echo those of his hero Hitler.

In the mid 1970s the National Front were on the march. Conditions favoured their growth. The first recession since the war was eating into people's living standards. A Labour Government was making deep cuts in wages, health care and

housing. The only things growing were the dole queues.

Now sections of the Tory Party around former Cabinet Minister Enoch Powell, along with much of the press, played the race card. Faced with this, the Labour government surrendered to racism. In the spring of 1976 the Southern African state of Malawi expelled its Asian population. Britain had settled these unfortunate people in the country when it was a colony. They held British passports. Naturally they expected to find shelter and safety in Britain. Instead they found race hate. At just this moment the Labour Party gave in to the International Monetary Fund's demands for swingeing cuts. Hospitals closed, council house building ceased and education funds were cut.

The Labour-supporting **Daily Mirror** appeared with the headline 'New Flood Of Asians To Britain'. The Tory **Telegraph** declared 'Invasion of Asians Forces Borough To Call For Help'. Even the liberal **Guardian** wrote 'Asians Riled Neighbours' when white neighbours set about an Asian family!

The Labour government responded in characteristic fashion. The Party's Chief Whip, Bob Mellish, told the Commons in May 1976:

The nation has done all it should have done. Its record is one of great honour and integrity, but I say 'enough is enough'... This burden cannot go on being taken by



Driving the Nazis from the streets of Lewisham

our people alone. If we do not face up to it now we will have to later on (Labour and Conservative cheers)... Let us start talking about whether we cannot... pay their fares and their rehabilitation back in India.

Enoch Powell made a number of inflammatory speeches about the Malawi Asians, seizing on Mellish's phrase 'enough is enough' and calling for the 'repatriation' of black 'immigrants'.

The National Front reaped the results of the press hysteria, Powell's demagogic and Labour's craven surrender to racism. In the course of 1976 they registered substantial electoral gains. In Blackburn their vote, combined with another smaller Nazi outfit, climbed to 38 percent in local elections. The Nazis had two councillors elected. In Leicester the Front won 44,000 votes with 48 candidates and in a local council by-election in Deptford (Lewisham), South London, the Nazis got 44 percent of the vote.

In 1977 matters got worse. In the May Greater London Council elections the National Front stood in 85 out of the 92 seats, getting 119,063 votes and beating the Liberals into fourth place in 33 seats.

On the basis of this, the Nazis decided to follow Mosley's example by holding marches to boost their support and image along the lines advocated by Tyndall. On each occasion they were confronted by anti fascists and protected by the police.

Two events would halt their advance.

The first came when the National Front was smashed off the streets of Lewisham. The second was the launching of the Anti Nazi League.

A few months before the Lewisham march the police had launched Operation 39 PNH. PNH stood for 'Police Nigger Hunt'. Black youth were dragged off in dawn raids on trumped up charges of robbery. The National Front seized on the chance to launch a vicious anti black campaign, harassing the defence campaign for the arrested black youth.

As in the 1930s, the local authorities pleaded with the government to ban the Nazi march. Lewisham's council leader, 1,500 local Christians and the TUC called for a ban.

The Labour Home Secretary refused on the grounds of 'free speech'—freedom in other words to incite race hate.

On the day, two counter-demonstrations were called. The first, headed by the local mayor and the local bishop, was called by the All London Committee Against Racism and Fascism (ALCARAF). It ended a mile from where the Nazis were assembling. Marchers were given a leaflet urging them not to go near the Nazis' assembly point and to rely on 'peaceful orderly methods'.

Meanwhile the Socialist Workers Party had organised to assemble where the Nazis were grouping. The ALCARAF leaflet announced 'we totally oppose the harassment and provocative march planned by the SWP'. However, both black and white local youth, socialists and veterans of the battles against Mosley joined the SWP in ensuring the Nazis were smashed off the streets. A quarter of London's police force, armed for the first time with riot shields, could not protect the fascists. Twice the anti fascists cut through police lines to slice the Nazi march in half. The Nazis fled the scene of battle.

It was a stinging defeat for the National Front.

Just as at Cable Street, the press and the Labour Party abused the anti fascist protesters. The *Daily Mirror* said the SWP was 'as bad as the National Front'. Labour's West Midlands organiser called the SWP 'red fascists'. The deputy prime minister, Michael Foot, long time Labour left winger, said:

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.

But the National Front's bubble was burst at Lewisham.

This success allowed the SWP, together with various Labour MPs and prominent figures, to launch the Anti Nazi League. The ANL ensured that the National Front did not recover.

It succeeded in exposing the National Front as Nazis in the eyes of millions. Two successful carnivals in London each drew 100,000 people. Its sister organisation Rock Against



Twice the NF march was sliced in half

Racism set up scores of concerts around the country.

The ANL mobilised black and white, Jew and gentile, young and old. Every time the Nazis appeared they were confronted by far more anti fascists. Every Nazi leaflet was answered by scores more ANL leaflets. ANL members organised locally to remove Nazi graffiti.

The battles continued, to a pattern. Large mobilisations confronted and dwarfed the Nazis, who in turn relied on police protection. This reached a climax during the 1979 election campaign when 3,000 police ran riot against anti fascists who were protesting against an NF meeting in Southall, West London. Here the police took their revenge for Lewisham, killing SWP member Blair Peach.

Nevertheless, the National Front went into spiralling decline after 1979 and British fascism spent a decade in the wilderness. The Anti Nazi League was a model of how to organise against the Nazis.

A frustrated National Front leader, Martin Webster, bitterly expressed his frustration at the Anti Nazi League's success during a libel case brought against him by ANL founder Peter Hain in 1982. Prior to 1977 he said the National Front was unstoppable, claiming he was on his way to becoming prime minister. Then suddenly the ANL was everywhere and knocking hell out of them. The sheer size of the ANL's presence on the streets meant it proved impossible to turn out Front members. Recruitment slumped and their vote collapsed.

The Nazis had lost—physically and morally broken.

4.

The rebirth of European fascism

THERE WAS dancing on the streets of Paris in June 1981. Champagne flowed at work. The joy followed the election of the Socialist Party's Francois Mitterrand as president. He seemed to offer a beacon of hope after 23 years of right wing rule.

A decade later Mitterrand was still in office, but the hope had long faded. Official unemployment had risen from 1.5 million to 2.7 million. Many more were on dead end government training courses or not entitled to benefit.

In 1981 the leader of the French National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen, could not even find the 500 signatures of elected mayors and councillors he needed to contest the presidency. Ten years on, he had 20 percent support in opinion polls and long overtaken the once powerful Communist Party.

Le Pen's Nazi record speaks for itself. It goes back to his student collaboration with the Nazis and the pro-Nazi wartime French government. In the 1965 presidential elections he was an agent for the fascist candidate. In 1968 he was convicted for touting recordings of Hitler's speeches and Nazi marching songs. He was condemned in a French civil court for anti semitism as late as June 1986. Today the National Front's 50 point programme on immigration includes calls for immigrants to be officially discriminated against in jobs and for the creation of a separate, inferior social system with inferior funding.

The NF has capitalised on Mitterrand's failure. Heavy industries such as coal and steel have been slashed. Wages

for many workers, particularly civil servants, have been held down and even reduced. Public services—notably transport, education and health—have steadily deteriorated. Meanwhile, profits have flourished.

Against this background, Le Pen began to gain an audience for his arguments that there was nothing to choose between Mitterrand and the mainstream parties of the right and that France was under siege from 'anti national forces' in the shape of international bankers and multinational capital. Then, in the 1986 general election, in an effort to save his own skin, Mitterrand altered France's proportional voting system to favour smaller parties. Mitterrand knew this new system would give the Nazis seats, but cynically calculated it would split the mainstream right. As a result, the National Front got 2.7 million votes and 35 MPs and the mainstream right won enough seats to form the government anyway. For the next two years the National Front kept its head down only to re-emerge more brazen about its fascist policies. Le Pen now described the Holocaust as 'a detail of history'.

The Nazis also rose atop a wave of racism fuelled by all the mainstream parties, including the Socialists. When, in the summer of 1991 a number of North African-populated areas in the major cities erupted in riots, the Socialist Party prime minister, Edith Cresson, talked of chartering planes to deport 'illegal immigrants' and asylum seekers. The Gaullist leader, Chirac, claimed French people were fed up with the 'noise' and 'smell' of immigrants.

Le Pen jumped on these remarks, exploiting the racism of his opponents, to claim he was right all along. There was some truth to his remark that 'people always prefer the original to the copy'. Mitterrand and the Socialists more or less conceded Le Pen's arguments, but promised to implement them in a more 'humane' way.

The Communist Party very often took a similar position. Until ten years ago it was the main working class party, larger than the Socialists in membership. It controls the major union federation, the CGT, and publishes a daily paper. But it joined Mitterrand's first government in 1981

and shared responsibility for its austerity measures. And, when racism surfaced in the Communists' 'Red Belt' stronghold around Paris, the Communist Party pandered to it.

At the beginning of 1981 the Communist mayor of Vitry led a 'commando group' to wreck a hostel to prevent 300 immigrants moving in. The party daily, *Humanité*, threw its weight behind the mayor's action. It proudly recorded his words to immigrants before the attack: 'You have no right to take young French workers' accommodation'.

Humanité produced a special free edition with the headline 'No To Immigrant Ghettoes'. Under the heading 'A Frank Look At The Problems Posed By Immigration' was displayed a large photo of a dole queue. Inside, the paper stated: 'Immigration must be stopped so as not to worsen unemployment'.

The Communist Party has done little since to confront the Nazi threat. Le Pen has been able to make serious gains within the 'Red Belt' and amongst Marseilles dockers—a group who traditionally backed the Communists.

Worse still, the Communist Party issued a leaflet in the summer of 1991 which began: 'we say immigration is becoming a real problem today'. It linked the rise in crime, unemployment and the worsening social security system and health service to the number of immigrants.

Fascism cannot be weakened through acceptance of its arguments.

However, the rise of Le Pen has provoked a response. There can be no doubt the basis for a movement against the National Front exists. On May Day 1989 Le Pen called a march through Paris. He turned out 40,000. A rival left wing demonstration drew 100,000—though mistakenly it did not confront the Nazi march.

Hundreds of thousands marched after a horrific attack on a Jewish cemetery in 1990. 43 percent of those polled at the close of 1991 'utterly opposed' everything the National Front stood for.

When, at the end of 1986, students occupied their colleges and took to the streets, black, white and Arab stood together. An Arab student killed by the police became a nationwide

symbol among the young. The urban riots of 1991 showed that Arab and black youth are not prepared to be pushed around or to accept second class status. There is even a significant anti racist movement formed to oppose the Front, SOS Racisme.

The problem is that none of the anti racist organisations have given an effective lead in crushing Le Pen.

SOS Racisme refuses to confront the Nazis directly. It organises anti racist carnivals and talks of the need to improve people's living conditions in order to root out racism. This is all fine, but does nothing to mobilise people against the fascists. SOS Racisme is also bound by its links to Mitterrand who is responsible for creating the bitterness Le Pen has exploited.

Tragically, the main far left groups have also failed to build in response to the rise of the Nazis. Lutte Ouvrière won 600,000 votes in the 1988 presidential elections. Yet it refuses to openly label Le Pen and the National Front as Nazis. It barely talks about the threat of Le Pen. Rather it



Students united in struggle—an example of the action that could be turned against the Nazis

argues racism will be beaten when workers struggle in the factories. This is abstention. It does nothing to defend blacks and Arabs under attack, to stop National Front marches or even to remove their filthy graffiti.

Trotsky argued against a similar position in Germany in the 1930s:

Is it correct that in order to destroy unemployment and misery it is first necessary to destroy capitalism? It is correct. But only the biggest blockhead can conclude from all this that we do not have to fight this very day, with all our forces, against the measures with whose aid capitalism is increasing the misery of the workers.

The far left is large enough to mobilise and to put pressure on the Socialist and Communist Parties to follow their lead. They could follow the model of the Anti Nazi League in Britain.

Le Pen, like fascists everywhere, thrives on building a hard core of Nazi thugs through his racist outbursts and his encouragement of racist violence. However, he wants to surround and disguise his Storm Troopers with a growing body of softer electoral support.

The National Front thrives on the lack of confrontation. Counter-demonstrations and protests would strip away its electoral image, label Le Pen as a Nazi and isolate his fascist thugs.

A journalist discovered this when she infiltrated the National Front in Marseilles. She described the fear provoked among Front supporters attending a rally when it was rumoured that SOS Racisme was organising a counter-demonstration. But she also described their elation and sense of victory when this proved false.

Millions of people across Europe have been chilled by the rise of the continent's top Nazi in France. They have also been horrified by the re-emergence of fascism in Germany.

The German Nazi organisations have not yet reached anything like Le Pen's support. They have achieved little of his respectability. The main far right outfit is the Republikaner Party which has a solid Nazi core. In the 1989

European elections it gained 2 million votes. Today it claims 25,000 members—an undoubted exaggeration.

However, the Nazis hope that here, as in France, economic misery and the lack of an effective alternative can draw more support.

Their main success came after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The German Nazis targeted eastern Germany and its youth in particular. Decades of Stalinist rule left an ideological vacuum and massive discontent. In the first flushes of joy as the wall fell beautiful ideas flourished—equality, democracy and solidarity. But soon the east German economy collapsed. Unemployment mounted. Prices rose. The dreams were wiped out by the reality of the market.

The Nazis capitalised on the fact that racism had been deliberately stirred up by Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrat government. There was a wave of strikes in both eastern and western Germany in the summer of 1991. The economic minister was bombarded with eggs by strikers.

The Christian Democrats sought a scapegoat to divert this anger and began to blame Germany's problems on refugees. Scare stories spread of 'hordes of immigrants' descending on Germany from eastern Europe and the old USSR. The Social Democratic Party rushed to tighten its policy on immigration.

The Christian Democrats claimed the western city of Bremen was a haven for refugees. Elections were looming. The local SPD president responded by banning Poles and Romanians from the city! The Nazis reaped the harvest of this racism, taking eight percent of the vote in the city.

The strong German Green Party was caught too. Sections of it have initiated anti fascist demonstrations. But Green MPs did a deal with the government which allowed it to make asylum applications more difficult and set up special camps for refugees.

In the east, the hysteria about refugees was a godsend for the Nazis. Eastern German youth wanted change. They hated the old system but felt betrayed after the promises made about the new, united Germany. The Nazis began to make ground. Arson and physical attacks mounted. Matters

came to a climax with a firebomb attack in broad daylight by a Nazi gang on an immigrant hostel in Hoyerswerda.

It would be wrong, however, to believe that everything is going the Nazis' way. There is strong anti Nazi sentiment in both halves of the country and the outrages have sparked a response. There were massive demonstrations against Republikaner leaflets during the 1989 European elections.

In Hoyerswerda itself 4,000 anti fascists demonstrated on the weekend after the pogrom, including several hundred locals. Across Germany over 100,000 demonstrated against the attack and to mark the anniversary of Hitler's *Kristallnacht*—the nationwide anti Jewish pogrom.

Yet there has been no concerted attempt by the left and anti fascists to take to the streets of the eastern towns where the violence is taking place.

Much of the left imagined the old East Germany was socialist. When the Berlin Wall fell they were confused. Workers, it seemed, were celebrating the collapse of 'socialism'. This has led many to simply write off eastern German workers as right wing.

But where the anti fascists have taken to the streets of eastern Germany they have met with a good response.

In both France and Germany the fascists have benefitted from the surrender to racism by the established parties and by the effects of recession. In France they have been allowed a clear run by the lack of any sustained opposition.

Yet when powerful movements of black and white have fought back—as in France at the end of 1986 and the beginning of 1987 or in the strikes which swept Germany in 1991—the fascists have been pushed aside.

When the fascists have been confronted, the anti fascists have shown that they can mobilise far wider forces.

Fascism is far from carrying the day. The conditions for defeating it are very favourable—provided those who want to fight take note of the lessons of the struggles against fascism from the 1930s and the 1970s.

The fight against fascism today

5.

PEOPLE WHO want to fight fascism effectively always come up against a number of arguments. The most common runs: 'I don't agree with what the fascists say but I'll defend their right to say it'. We live after all in what is called a 'democratic' society. Free speech has been fought for long and hard.

Socialists are democrats. We believe in *more* democracy than exists at present. We believe in control of society by the mass of the population—not by a rich ruling class or a state bureaucracy. Socialists want free speech. We were in the front line in fighting to win it. We thrive on discussion and debate.

But is freedom defended by allowing free speech in every case? Would you grant freedom of speech to a party of men who wanted to campaign for the right to rape women in the streets? No—nor should we grant freedom of speech to those who incite the intimidation and murder of black people.

This is not abstract. In 1976 Enoch Powell made a series of inflammatory speeches demanding the expulsion of blacks. A wave of racist attacks and murders quickly followed. In 1978 the **Glasgow Herald** reported that after the NF set up shop in Edinburgh:

A wave of vandalism aimed at Asian premises followed. Slogans were daubed on Sikh, Pakistani and Indian shops and restaurants and two business premises in Edinburgh were subject to fire-bomb attacks.

Nazi organisations aim to organise against black people and other racial minorities and to drive them from this

country. Ultimately, the aim to repeat the Holocaust. Their arguments are not based on rational debate but on race hatred. Hitler's Storm Troopers did not swing people behind the Nazi Party by argument. They built their support through racial thuggery.

We reject the view that denying a platform to fascists restricts freedom of expression. Quite the opposite—to allow fascists to organise is to jeopardise the lives of black people, the very existence of the labour movement and every freedom we have won so far.

History has shown that the Nazis can only be stopped by confrontation. Hitler understood this very well. Shortly after he took power he admitted:

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

In combatting this menace we cannot rely on formal bans by government. Such bans did not block Hitler's rise. Instead, the state decided when and where to restrain, and then unleash, the fascists according to its needs. Fascism, as we have seen, is ultimately a tool of the state. We cannot, therefore, expect it to be stopped by the state.

What counts is activity—activity by the greatest number of people that can be mobilised. As we've seen, that was successful in Britain at Cable Street in 1936 and on the streets of Lewisham in 1977. Such mobilisation can only be built with open calls to smash the Nazis as a menace to all ordinary people, not just by moral appeals against racism.

By demonstrating that fascism could be stopped, by socialists taking the initiative independently, we could win support for such a strategy from far wider layers of people.

Leon Trotsky also argued for such mobilisation to stop Hitler in the 1930s. His strategy centred on the need to build unity against the Nazis—*unity in action*.

The tragedy was he did not have the forces to influence the powerful Communist and Social Democratic parties who together could have smashed the Nazis right up until Hitler

took power. Trotsky took the same starting point in regard to the civil war in Spain. There, the left argued for a unity without action, for damping down struggle. Again, the result was disaster.

There is one qualification. We are for confrontation, but only through mobilising large numbers of people. In the 1930s dozens of Communist Party members died fighting the Nazis long before Hitler took power. But their party leaders stopped them fighting effectively as they couldn't draw in wide layers of other workers. Such a strategy of isolated confrontation was tragic in Germany in the 1930s. Today it would be farcical. Rather than seeking to mobilise large numbers, such squads become more and more conspiratorial, more and more isolated and almost exclusively made up of young, white males.

Trotsky was clear on this matter. Writing after the Communist Party employed such tactics in France in the early 1930's he wrote:

The task is to *involve* the workers in increasing numbers in the fight against fascism... adventures can only isolate a small, militant minority.

Repeating the message he wrote:

We are for *active self defence*... This active self defence can be successful when it is supported and covered by the understanding and sympathy of the great mass of workers, and the Social Democratic workers first of all...

Two final points must be made. The need to confront the Nazi thugs is vital. But around them they can win layers of supporters who are not hard core Nazis. Mass propaganda which identifies these outfits as Nazi full square and spells out what they stand for can break many of these soft supporters. In addition, campaigns around the sorts of daily economic problems faced by ordinary people can help undermine racism and lay the basis for black and white unity against the bosses.

We are helped by the fact that in Britain in the 1990s black people are more confident and more organised than 10

or 20 years ago. Black and white live together, work together, socialise together even more than they did 10 years ago. Britain does not have the sort of segregated housing that exists in the United States. Black people are *more* likely to be in trade unions than whites.

But racism still exists because the system we live under is racist from head to toe. We cannot afford to be complacent.

There is a sea of bitterness in Britain. The Tories are hated. But Labour offers no answers. The collapse of much of the left has created a vacuum. The Communist Party is dead. Labour's membership has shrunk and become increasingly middle class. That means there is no organised left wing presence on many housing estates, in many workplaces, schools and colleges.

Nature abhors a vacuum. Something will inevitably fill it. The sort of anger we saw explode against the Tory poll tax—with the biggest riot in London for a century—or in the riots of 1991 in Cardiff, Oxford and Newcastle can go in two directions.

If socialists give a lead we can turn that anger against the government, against police harassment and this rotten system. We can show that working people, black and white, are in the same boat—that we can and must fight together.

But if Nazis or racists are allowed a free hand they will divert that anger against the black families on the estates, against refugees or Asian shopkeepers.

Socialist organisation is vital in ensuring that does not happen. That is the task the Socialist Workers Party has set itself. That is why we were central in relaunching the broad based Anti Nazi League. That organisation can repeat its previous success and stop the Nazis.

But the weekly fights—against the poll tax, over council rents, student poverty, against unemployment, attacks on wages and conditions or in defence of education and health—are crucial.

As socialists we will stand alongside anyone who wants to fight the Nazis. But we know fascism springs from capitalism. It is spawned in the sewers of a rotten system.

We can turn back this flood of filth that most people

thought was banished forever in 1945—in Britain, Europe or anywhere else. But if we are to once and for all rid this world of fascism and racism we need to rid it of a rotten system—a capitalist system which breeds war, famine and recession.



Other publications from the Socialist Workers Party

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Killing the Nazi menace

how to stop the
fascists

by Chris Bambery

THE PERIL of Nazism once more stalks Europe, within living memory of Hitler's Holocaust.

In eastern Germany, Nazi thugs firebombed a refugee hostel in broad daylight. In France, Europe's top Nazi, Jean-Marie Le Pen, claimed the Holocaust was a 'detail of history'—and still his fascist National Front got over four million votes.

Other Nazi parties have made breakthroughs elsewhere in Europe and the still small British National Party hopes to emulate them here. The tide of Nazism has gained alarming momentum.

Yet this is not inevitable, or unstoppable. Many people want to crush the Nazi menace. To do this we need to grasp how they have gained a foothold and how we can stop them in their tracks.

**A Socialist
Workers Party
pamphlet**

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