



Our flag stays red

East London Workers Against Racism

30p

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Revolutionary Communist Tendency

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OUR FLAG STAYS RED!

Introduction

IN JANUARY this year a report documenting more than a thousand recent incidents of racist violence in Britain landed on the desk of Home Secretary William Whitelaw. Its main message: racially motivated beatings, stabbings, firebombings and murders have become part of everyday life for black people all over the country. Its subsidiary message: many of the attacks which blacks have experienced have been inspired, if not directly organised, by fascist groups.

This was one report on racism which Whitelaw could not afford to ignore. Why? Not because of the level of oppression it detailed, but because it mentioned something that could only cause him consternation — the fact that disciplined squads of ‘vigilantes’ patrol the streets of East London to prevent racist attacks; the fact that such bodies do, in effect, take the law into their own hands.

The Home Secretary sensed danger. Left-wing Labour MP Joan Lestor and her colleagues on the all-party ‘Joint Committee Against Racism’ which had put the report together had taken pains to make clear what that danger consisted of. Unless decisive action was taken by the police, they had argued, the vigilante cancer evident in East London would spread to other parts of the capital and to other cities too. The threat to racial harmony lay not only in the thuggery of the extremists of the right, but in the response from organisations like East London Workers Against Racism (ELWAR).

What is ELWAR, and why are politicians from William Whitelaw to Joan Lestor so worried about it? In this pamphlet we answer these questions. We also explain what we mean by ‘workers’ defence against racist attacks’, and why we believe that it is of vital significance to the *whole* working class — black *and* white. In addition, we take issue with the Labour Party and the leaders of Britain’s official trade union movement: we repudiate their patriotic position on racism and present a different way forward.

First, however, we show why Whitelaw and his fellow parliamentarians place

'The second, and more disturbing development, the committee said, is that of self-defence or vigilante groups.'
(The Guardian, 13 February 1981)

such stress on maintaining law and order — and why workers should put no trust in the measures he and his Labour accomplices put forward to deal with racial violence.

Whitelaw's whitewash

'A more active police presence in some of the areas of greatest racial tension — for example off the Mile End Road — would remove the need for the vigilante groups which have been starting up to protect the property of their neighbours.'
(Editorial, The New Standard, 18 March 1981)

Once he had finished scanning the report before him, Whitelaw acted swiftly. Scotland Yard was alerted. More intensive police patrolling and door-to-door interrogations began in East London particularly around Mile End.

All this attention from the constabulary came as a bit of a surprise to the Bengali families who live in the area. In the past, they had often demanded police protection from racist attacks, only to be fobbed off with excuses. 'There's nothing we can do', they said, 'unless you catch the attackers we can't help you'. Indeed the police recently advised members of one family to give up sleeping in beds at the front of their house — where they were regularly showered with bricks and broken window panes, the work of local racists — and instead repair to the bathroom every night.

It soon became clear what the police's interest was. Their mission had only one purpose: not to root out the racist menace, but to isolate those who refuse to be unnerved by it — those who fight back. Their questions didn't focus on the National Front, the New National Front or the British Movement. They revolved around East London Workers Against Racism. Moreover, their questions have been growing more persistent.

Fortunately very few black people are taken in by the tactics of the police. But there can be no doubt that Whitelaw

is working overtime to demonstrate his good intentions. Special 'anti-racist' police units have been proposed. An inquiry has been set up into the far right. The Home Office has relented on immigration a little — a few concessions to critics of the new laws on British citizenship have been made, and a few reprieves for immigration law victims like Anwar Ditta have been dished out. And the courts have been given a good whitewash too: a few fascists have recently been sent down for their 'crimes' and some of the Bristol 'riot' defendants have been acquitted.

But Whitelaw's attempts to outflank his opponents cannot work. The hideous face of British racism cannot be disguised by yet another 'high level investigation'. The truth of the matter is that racism is getting worse all the time. With every increase in unemployment, hysteria about putting the nation back on its feet again increases too — and, with it, the implicit or explicit feeling that blacks must put up, shut up or get out of Britain altogether. Even a camouflage expert like Whitelaw cannot hide this.

Black people are being hit on all sides. By fascist gangs, who take popular support for national revival to its logical and violent conclusion. By employers, who are laying off black workers four times faster than whites. And by the state, now out to destroy the few rights blacks still have left through the Nationality Bill. Of course, Whitelaw doesn't want racism to get out of hand: he fears the spontaneous unrest this would provoke and he is even more terrified by

the possibility of an anti-racist movement growing in the working class. But the racist offensive is gathering pace all the same.

Like Whitelaw, the Labour Party condemns the shock troops of the far right. But Labour looks to the same state that employs Home Office officials to keep blacks out and pays police to keep them down, to deal with the fascist groups. Let's see what this means in practice.

Their morals and ours

In March the Government banned fascist groups from marching in London, the Midlands and Yorkshire. Labour dignitaries were overwhelmed with joy. Sidney Bidwell MP, a member of the left-wing 'Tribune' group, thanked Whitelaw personally in Parliament.

Every Labour politician agrees that using the state is the only way to deal with racial harassment. Just about the only difference Labour has with the Tories over racist attacks is its deeper desire to see them ended by more 'community policing'. More bobbies on the beat, that's its answer to racist attacks. Tell that to West Indians in Deptford, accused by the police of murdering their own children. Tell it to Bengalis in Brick Lane — they've already got a 'community' police station right in their midst, one that keeps a close eye and a tight

grip on young Asians, but somehow has other things to do when hundreds of fascists stomp around the area every Sunday!

Labour's 'solution' to racist terror is no solution at all. But Labour rules out the physical defence of black people — *the only solution that works*. Labour Party personality Peter Hain, press officer for the Anti-Nazi League, and the man who recently knocked on White-law's door to plead for personal protection from fascist attacks, is very clear on this. Interviewed in the *New Musical Express* on how the ANL is going to respond to racial violence, he said:

'The one thing we're not getting into is a counter-terrorist operation. I think that would be politically wrong, morally unacceptable. I think it would be totally counter-productive.' (7 March 1981)

Hain says: turn the other cheek. ELWAR says: when black people are attacked they must be defended — that is what ELWAR is all about.

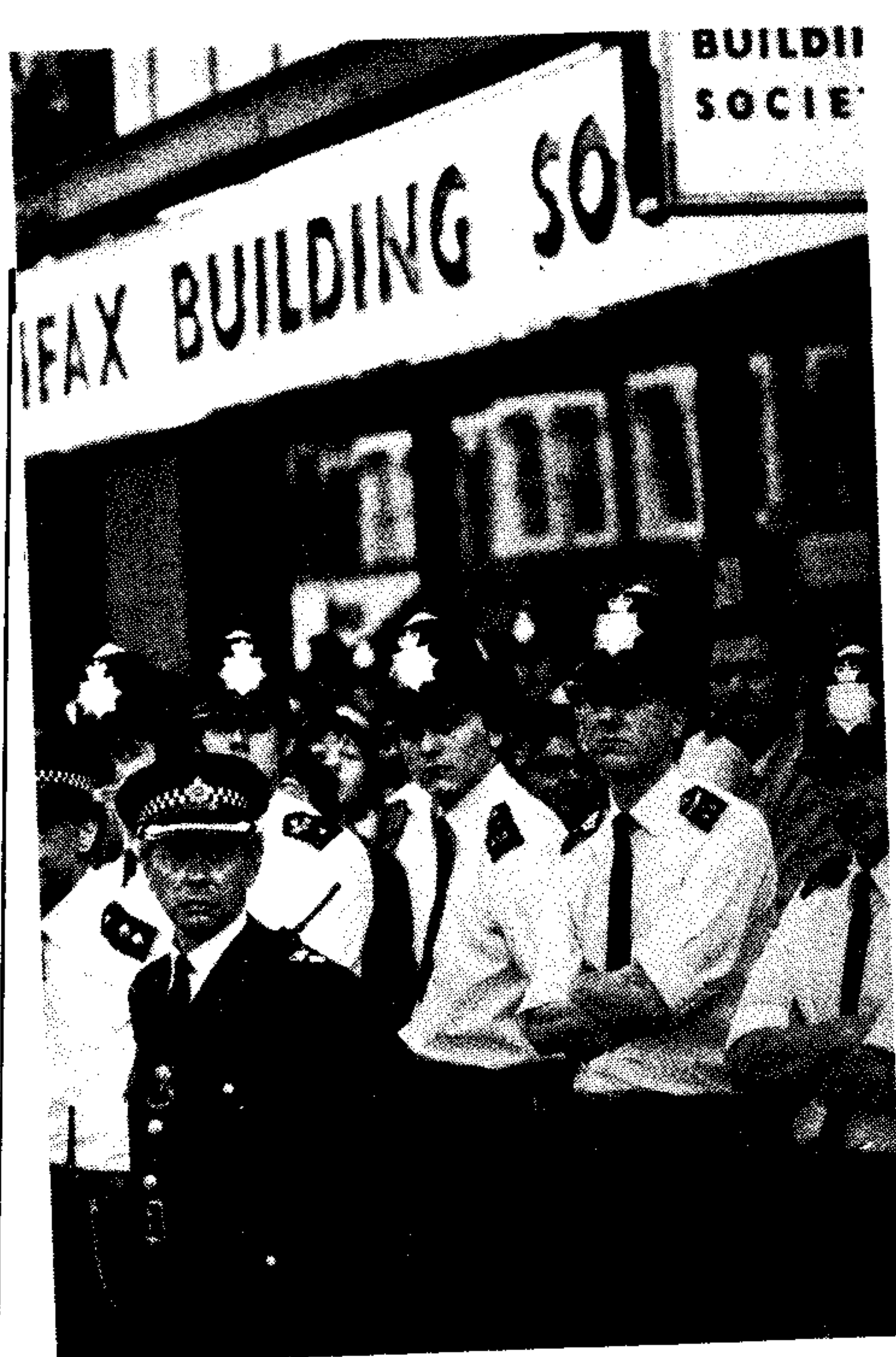
Not self-defence but workers' defence

In less than two years ELWAR has built up a network of supporters who are prepared to do more than talk about combatting racism. Every day of the week ELWAR supporters are on call ready to take action against racist attacks. Today in areas where the National Front has polled up to 20 per cent of the vote, racism is at last being tackled head-on.

Why does ELWAR call for *workers'* defence against racist attacks? For too many years now black people have been forced to fight on their own. During the 1978 fascist riots in Brick Lane it was mainly Asians who patrolled the area. Again, in Newham today, skinhead gangs are only opposed by Asian youth. Similarly in Hackney, West Indian

'The issue of community self-defence is one which would undoubtedly injure the breadth of support.'

(Peter Hain, *Searchlight*, February 1981)



Police on guard where Akhtar Ali Baig was murdered — a week later.

youths have been forced to resist systematic police harassment of their clubs unaided.

Guilty, condescending and liberal in outlook, the British left sees only the courage black people display in their struggles. It looks on approvingly, ignoring the fact that, at present, blacks can and do expect little assistance from outside quarters. Worse, from the safety of its members' homes the left declares that *self-defence* 'is no offence'. 'We support your right to defend yourselves' they say, 'go right ahead — but don't bother us, except if you ever need the name of a solicitor'.

Last summer in Newham more than 40 Asian youths were arrested on the demonstrations that followed the murder of Akhtar Ali Baig, a young Pakistani

stabbed to death by four racist thugs. They discovered that, in this wonderful democracy of ours, 'self-defence' is an offence. When fighting broke out between Asians and skinheads after three of Ali Baig's four killers were eventually let off by the courts, two Asians were charged with grievous bodily harm. They too learnt that self-defence is an offence — and that every time black people fight back they come up against the power of the British state.

All this is beyond the British left. But that's not all. When white radicals say they support the right of black people to defend themselves what they are saying is that racism isn't a problem for white workers. They are letting the organised labour movement off the hook.

The slogan 'self-defence is no offence' helps to keep black people where the bourgeoisie wants them: out in the cold. That's why we reject it. For us racism isn't a problem that just afflicts black people; it's a deathly threat to *every* worker. 'Without them (the blacks) we would have jobs' — this is how the *Financial Times* quotes a white unemployed youth in Birmingham about life on the dole ('Where work is a black and white issue', 23 March 1981), and so long as attitudes like this are left unchallenged the *Financial Times* will laugh all the way to the Stock Exchange.

Though black people fight on their own, that doesn't mean that they alone suffer the consequences. Every time workers turn their backs on the treatment inflicted on blacks it's not only a victory for the fascists: it's a victory for the bosses over the working class.

Workers' defence is not only about defending black people. It's about defending the entire working class from the capitalists' efforts to divide us.

Black people must be *defended*, not left to the tender mercies of the Home Office or of 'community policemen'. This, as we have seen, is ELWAR's first tenet. The second is this: the defence of black people must be built *by and in the working class*, or it will not succeed.

As yet workers' defence does not have the support it deserves. The power of the British working class has not been harnessed to the anti-racist struggle. The cause of this state of affairs is to be found in the politics of the Labour Party. A brief look at how Labourism has affected the working class in East London will begin to illustrate this.

East London: Labour's rotten record

In East London divisions between white and black run deep. They've been cultivated for years. Not just by the fascists, who've made the area their base since the days of Oswald Moseley and his Black-shirts, but — less consciously, though more effectively — by the Labour Party.

All the three boroughs of inner East London — Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham — are Labour-controlled and have been for decades. And all pursue the same racist policy on housing: drive black people into slum ghettos like

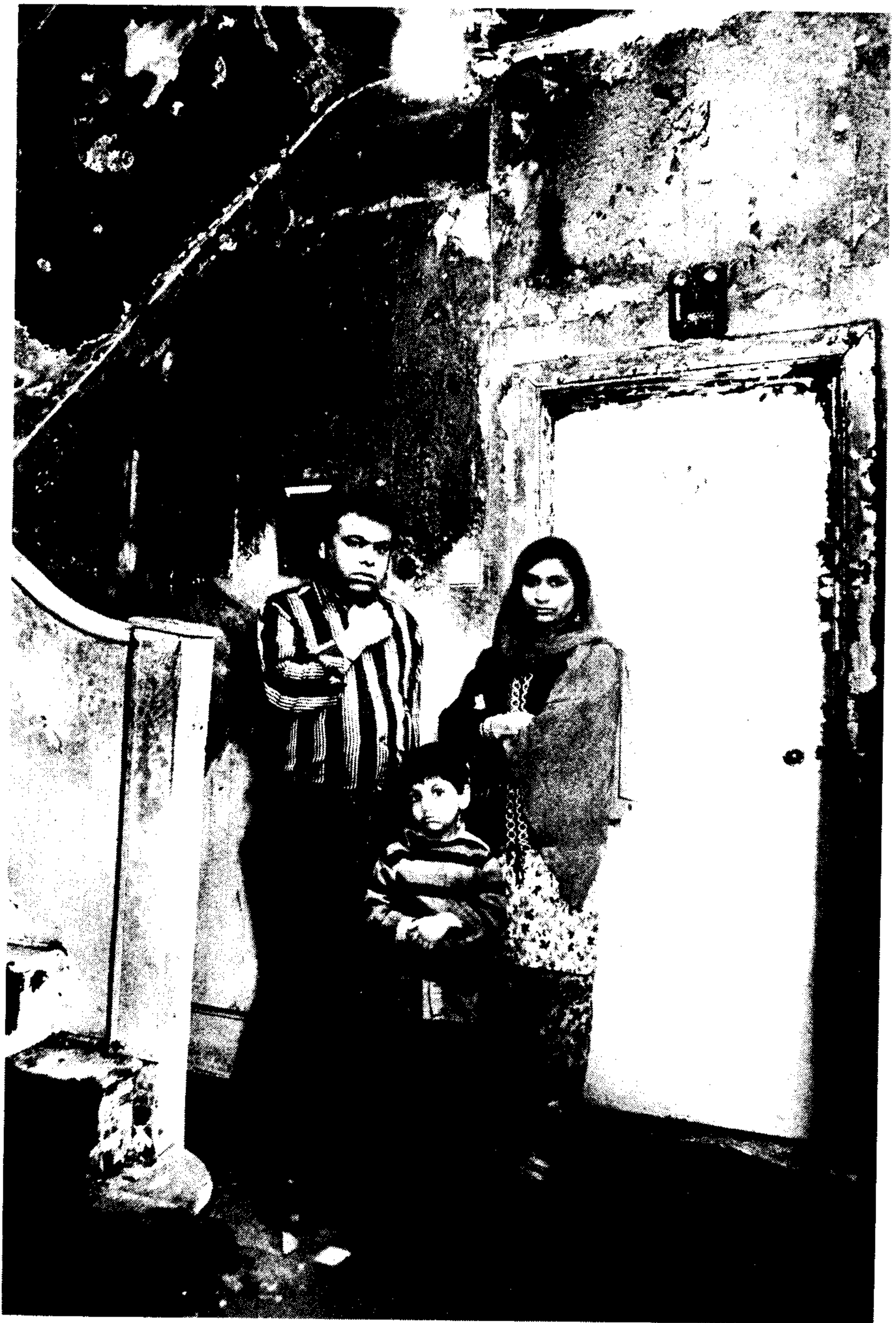
Brick Lane, disperse a few onto run-down housing estates and blame the rest for the housing shortage. Take Newham, for instance. Council leader Jack Hart is on record as saying he thinks his borough has had more than its 'fair share' of Asians. And ex-mayor Len Woods? He's asked why his white constituents should pay rates to house 'wogs' and 'coons'.

With jobs it's the same story. East London is notorious for its 'rag trade' — based on sweated immigrant labour; but even in this industry, where workers are on starvation wages, there's massive unemployment. The only major manufacturer employing blacks in the area — Ford, Dagenham — is making thousands redundant. Ford's Foundry, which has a largely black workforce, is about to shut down.

Blacks who still have jobs in East London generally work for small, non-unionised firms, or in the lowest public sector grades. Labour has done nothing to fight the scores of small-firm closures that have hit East London over the past two years; and in town halls it's done worse than nothing. Newham Council, for example, plans a thousand sackings over the next few months.

For more than half a century the Labour Party has presided over the decay of East London. In the process it has made sure that immigrants stay at the bottom of the heap. Labour Party politics have allowed the fascists to flourish.

As for the trade union movement, the record of its leading lights in East London is equally disgraceful. Over the last three years their sole contribution to fighting racism has been a paper cam-



The Singh family in the fire-bombed house
the Labour council refused to move them
from — until ELWAR stepped in.

FOUR REASONS T

1 YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED

Why? Because we don't promise you anything in the first place. What's the point of promising jobs for all, decent housing or cheap transport when the money isn't there? Everybody knows there's a crisis. Profits are down and three million people are on the dole. When politicians promise you the earth they're just lying. The only way to get what you need — or even to hang on to what you've got — is to fight for it. That's what ELWAR is prepared to do.

2 YOUR VOTE WON'T BE WASTED

Voting for anybody else is a waste of time. The Tories make no secret about it. They're out to cut working class living standards to the bone. The Labour Party's no different: it just goes about the Tories' work a different way — by putting through massive rate increases as well as rent rises and redundancies. And a vote for the Liberals is the same as voting Tory. The National Front? They're the bosses' front. They help the bosses by blaming blacks for everything.

3 IT'S A VOTE AGAINST RACISM

If you live in East London you've got no choice — you're either for racism or against it. All the other parties are racist. They all support immigration controls. They all discriminate against black people. The National Front says 'send them all home'. The Labour Party says 'don't let any more in'. ELWAR says that everybody, black or white, has the right to a job, a home, and a decent life in East London. And ELWAR doesn't tolerate racist thugs. We fight back when black people are attacked.

TO VOTE ELWAR

4 IT'S A VOTE FOR SOCIALISM

Heard that one before? The Labour Party calls itself socialist. It's run East London for more than 50 years, and done more to give socialism a bad name than anybody else. But socialism isn't 40 per cent more on the dole in six months. Socialism isn't thousands on the housing waiting list. Socialism isn't unemployed school-leavers queueing up to join the National Front or joining the British army – where they learn how to keep down their fellow workers in Ireland. If you're sick of the phoney socialists, if you want less talk and more action, vote ELWAR.

WHY VOTE AT ALL?

In the 1977 GLC Elections only one in three people bothered to vote. We don't blame those who didn't. ELWAR wasn't around. But now you've got a choice. Don't stay away on 7 May.

DON'T JUST VOTE ELWAR – JOIN US!

Elections come and go. But ELWAR is always around. Fighting the fascist threat on the streets. Leading militant struggles for jobs and homes. Join us now!

_____ 

I want to join/want more information about ELWAR

Name _____

Address _____

Tel No _____

TU/Organisation _____

Send to: ELWAR c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Rd, E8
or phone: 01-274 3951

The platform of our three candidates in the
May 1981 Greater London Council elections.

paigned by the name of the 'South East Region TUC Initiative', aimed at getting more Asian garment workers to join trade unions. It didn't work. Half of East London's black garment workers are unemployed, and the rest have no reason to expect anything from a trade union movement that's tolerated their super-exploitation from the day they arrived in Britain.

Despite the fact that Labour councils and trade union officials are concerned about the growth of fascist violence they have yet to launch a campaign against it. To understand why we have to go into the politics of the Labour Party and the TUC a bit more deeply.

'British jobs for British workers'

For all their anti-racist rhetoric, the leaders of the official labour movement always put Britons first. When forced into a corner they'll admit that immigration controls are one way to hold unemployment down. With their futures tied to the survival of the capitalist status quo, they want to reverse Britain's industrial decline by keeping everything foreign out — foreign cars, foreign textiles, foreign apples and, where possible, foreign workers. They're the most en-

'The French Communist Party, which has always fiercely opposed all racial and religious discrimination, condemns all threats to the dignity of these men and women living far from home. . . . It is for this reason that in the present economic crisis and to avoid adding to the 2 million French and immigrant workers already unemployed that the PCF is calling for a halt to immigration.'

(Morning Star, 15 January 1981)

This is how the British Communist Party commented on the PCF's racist election campaign, which included a raid on an immigrants' hostel and smears of Africans as drug dealers. The French 'Communists' have simply carried to its logical conclusion the nationalist outlook they share with their British comrades.

thusiastic champions of import controls, buying British, getting out of the EEC and making Britain great again; so it's not surprising that our trade union leaders aren't champions of the oppressed. They're prepared to take dues off their black members, but they'll always treat blacks as second-class workers.

The British trade union movement is staffed by nationalist functionaries at every level. Union officials at Ford, for instance, regard mass sackings of black foundry workers as inevitable and, instead of fighting for all jobs, spend their time hawking petitions round the shop floor calling for import controls on Japanese cars. Sad to say, this kind of bigotry extends right down to grass roots level. In Tower Hamlets, for example, the local Trades Council doesn't fight for industrial action to defend garment workers' jobs; it lines up with the

employers and demands import controls to keep out 'cheap foreign clothes'.

With policies like these about in the working class, it's no wonder that the fascists have an easy time of it. They just go one step further than the labour bureaucrats. They want all imports banned, *all* foreigners kicked out and black people are blamed for everything.

Any trade unionist confronted with organised racists at his place of work must face up to this reality. Racism cannot be fought effectively and the fascists cannot be put down until we kick the chauvinists at the head of our movement out of the way first. This is ELWAR's third tenet: that *the struggle to get trade unionists to defend black people from racist attacks is a struggle against import controls and every other nationalist policy the trade union leaders propose as a way of beating the crisis.*

'Squads march on hate thugs'

'Vigilante groups are patrolling the streets of Tower Hamlets to protect immigrant families from racist thugs. And they're prepared to meet violence with violence.'

(East London Advertiser, 21 November 1980)



Brick Lane: ELWAR speaks out.

In East London ELWAR has begun that struggle. But more needs to be done. What will teachers in the NUT do about the headmaster of St Mathias school in Brick Lane, a man who blames Bengali children for low educational standards? How will NUPE workers deal with Area Health Authority circulars which exclude immigrants from using NHS facilities at the London and Hackney hospitals? When the Nationality Act becomes law, how will CPSA members at East Ham dole offices treat non-British citizens seeking benefits? These are the tasks facing our trade union supporters now: the sooner other trade unionists recognise them as their tasks too, the better.

The battle for workers' defence will not be won if it is restricted to East London. That's why ELWAR is organising a national conference on fighting racism in July this year. We have identified the political problems that face anti-racists. We have also managed to demonstrate the effectiveness of workers' defence, and, in so doing, have gained important experiences which anti-racists throughout Britain should discuss and assess. Every worker concerned for the interests of his class should come to our conference.

What does it mean to be against racism today? ELWAR says that it means taking up the fight against fascism on the streets and challenging nationalism where it really counts, inside the labour movement. We intend to replace workers' pride in being British with pride in upholding the cause of the oppressed.

We say no to the patriotic red, white and blue of the National Front. We say no too to the pink, white and blue of the Labour Party and the TUC. Our flag stays red.





WORKERS AGAINST RACISM

ELWAR is ready to fight back against the fascists and the state. We're also ready to fight racism in the labour movement. Are you ready to support us?

Raise this motion in your workplace or organisation:

This branch, trades council, etc.

- notes the build-up in racist attacks and state harassment of black people
- deplores the failure of the labour movement to take action in defence of black people
- resolves to
 - (a) bring out its members to defend black people when they're attacked
 - (b) oppose all forms of immigration control and resist the deportation of any black workers
- supports the campaign organised by East London Workers Against Racism and will send two delegates to its national labour movement conference on 11 July, and make a donation of £ to ELWAR's defence fund.

SEND US MONEY!

Whitelaw and his agents are trying to track down the vigilantes. They're trying to put us out of business. Scores of ELWAR supporters have been arrested fighting fascists in Brick Lane, Paddington, Deptford. Fighting police frame-ups of black people costs hundreds of pounds. Rush us a donation fast. Make cheques/postal orders payable to 'ELWAR DEFENCE FUND' and send to ELWAR, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8.

JOIN ELWAR!

YOU'RE EITHER FOR US — OR AGAINST US .
JOIN ELWAR!

Name

Address

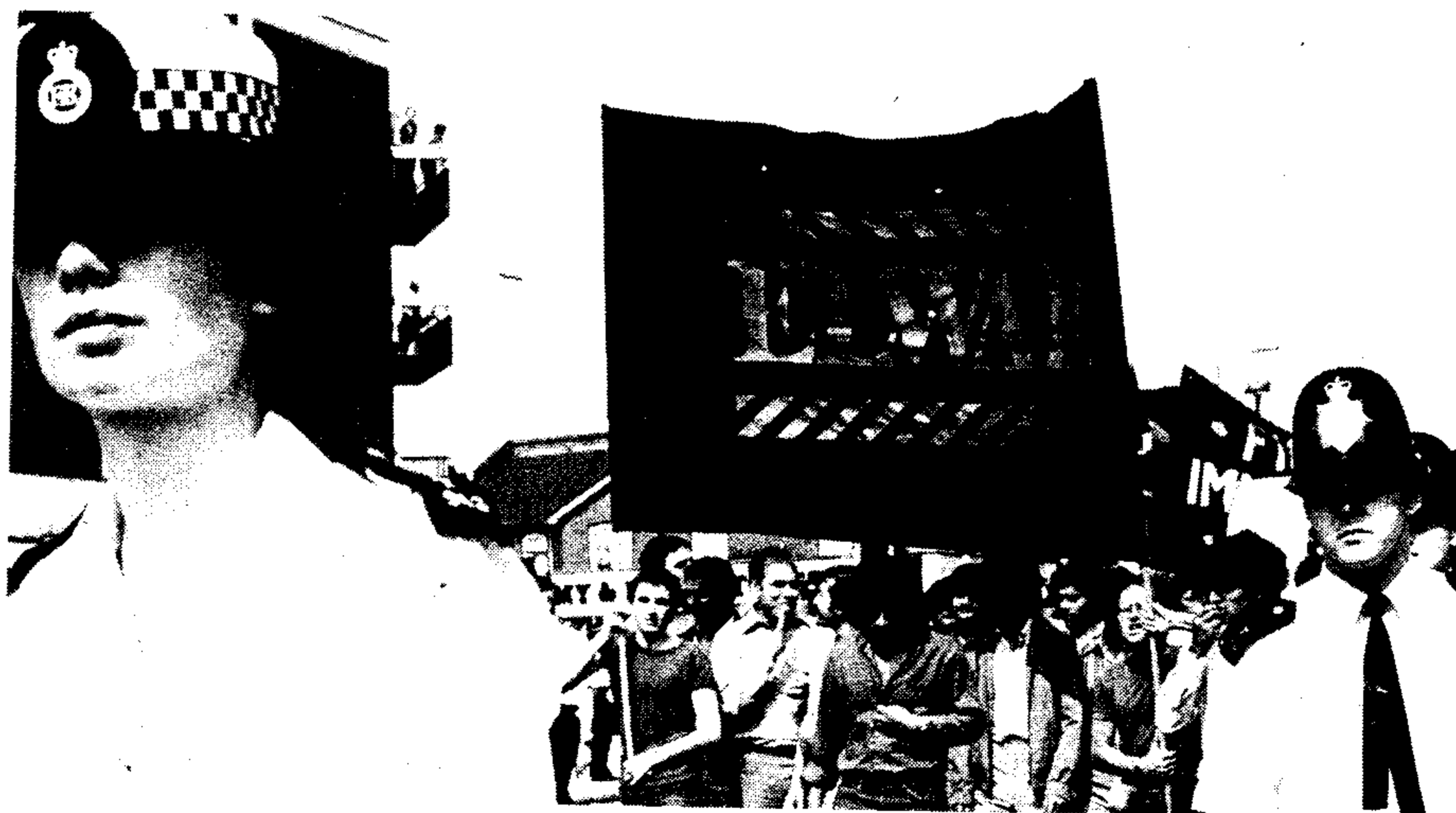
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Telephone no..

Trade union/organisation

£1 (individuals), £5 (organisations); make cheques/postal orders payable to ELWAR

Send to ELWAR, Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8



Picture credits:

Pages 7 & 12: Ian Frank

Pages 5,14,15 & cover: *the next step*

ing the 1 Jack rat

al Front has gone on the offensive. On 5 June a mob
n up a meeting held by East London Workers Against
anchester NF threatened a commando-style attack
il's conference on Ireland. And as we go to press the
demonstration against the people of the Middle East

Fascist squaddies against the Irish
The Manchester NF followed up its cam-
paign against the Irish solidarity work of
Tameside Trades Council with a threat to
break up its 7 June conference with a hit
squad of British army veterans. The fascist

Now for the Arabs and Iranians
The relentless racist propaganda churned
out by the media against the people of
the Middle East has succeeded in making
anti-Arab and anti-Persian chauvinism
respectable. Now the NF has jumped on

ays of fighting fascism

recently contacted East London
and their electricity cut off, their
gas meters broken open, their
People have been verbally abused,
robbed at knife-point and
from his heart. These are the sort
today: the problem for the labour
movement is to find ways of fighting
against these demonstrations against police harassment and fascist pro-
poganda and political pressure on the labour movement to recognise its class
interests and start defending black people. Below we detail some of the
recent activities of ELWAR.
After keeping the ANL on ice for almost two years, the SWP is trying to
revive it. On 23 November the ANL held a demonstration against the British
Movement in Paddington, and just before Christmas, it ran an all-star 'Inter-
national rally against the Nazis' near Euston. After the first, it made accu-
sations against ELWAR supporters; during the second, it physically
attacked them. For the facts, read on.

**NEWHAM
RECORDER
VIGILANTES
ARE WARNED**

The price of unity

THE NIGHT of the living dead. That was
the theme of the new ANL's international
rally. Chaired by SWP Central Committee
member Paul Holburne, the show
attracted 800 bone-white neo-fascists.
Though addressed by respectable people
from the official labour movement of
Britain, the demonstration was a

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency

Had enough?

Of the race relations industry,
community policing,
non-racist immigration controls
or anti-Nazi jamborees?

For too long racism has been ignored by the
British working class. *the next step* redresses
the balance by exposing racism where it
really matters — in the heart of the labour
movement. Every month *the next step* pro-
vides the arguments necessary for isolating
racism in the workers' movement. More than
that, it points the way forward — through
the activities of the RCT and ELWAR — to
building the anti-racist struggle in Britain.

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the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p



Labour and immigration

Cabinet minutes 1950, Nationality Bill PAGE 6



"WORKERS DEFENCE – THE ONLY WAY!"

EAST LONDON WORKERS AGAINST RACISM

NATIONAL LABOUR MOVEMENT CONFERENCE

Saturday 11 July 1981

10am – 6pm

Toynbee Hall, Commercial Street,
London E1

(opposite Aldgate East tube)

Sessions on: fascism, defence work, immigration, youth.

Plus:

'DEFEND THE BRICK LANE 5'

Fundraising benefit in the evening.

*For details write to ELWAR, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street,
London E8 or phone 01-274 3951.*