

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PAMPHLETS

UNDER A NATIONAL FLAG



Fascism, Racism and the Labour Movement

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UNDER A NATIONAL FLAG

The view from the labour movement

News of the National Front (NF) fills the press of both the labour movement and the bourgeoisie. Prominent church leaders, bourgeois politicians and trade union bureaucrats have all spoken out and condemned the NF. This concern with the NF stands in marked contrast to the silence of the labour movement on the question of racism. At the 1977 conferences of the Labour Party and the TUC, resolutions were passed pressing the Home Secretary to ban NF demonstrations; but at neither of these conferences were steps taken to counter racial discrimination or to challenge immigration control. In its annual report, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants noted the reluctance of those calling for opposition to the NF to commit themselves to fighting racism:

'there are still many who sincerely join in condemnation of the National Front but remain unaware of the full injustice of the immigration control, or are unwilling to take a stand on so unpopular an issue.' (*The Times*, 29 October 1977)

Racism is an 'unpopular issue', as the record of the official labour movement indicates. Time and again the labour movement passes resolutions against racism and time and again these resolutions prove to be so much rhetoric. When we examine its pragmatic approach to this unpopular issue we find that the anti-racist credentials of the official labour movement are entirely fictitious. More often than not the dividing line between our pragmatic anti-racists and those they condemn is far from apparent. Former Government Chief Whip and Labour MP Bob Mellish states:

'I am not a racist but I am not a humbug. This tiny island of ours is not much more than a dot on the map and the time has come to face the problem. It won't go away.

'We're bulging with more than a million unemployed, there's shortage of housing, and every family in the land, just about, is battling to maintain standards.

'...my views are not really different than Labour's policy over the years. We instituted the voucher system and that, after all, is a system of entry control.

'I am opposed to the floodgates being opened so that everyone can come crowding in, much as I sympathise with people who need help.' (*Daily Express*, 19 May 1976)

This view, which purports to be anti-racist at the same time as it supports immigration controls, is prevalent in the labour movement. It is summed up in the familiar statement 'I am not a racist, but...'. Mellish is enormously

sympathetic to 'people who need help', but of course not at the expense of the British nation. As a true British nationalist Mellish understands that charity begins at home and that black workers will just have to make do. Mellish is of course against the NF.

It is the strength of British nationalism in the labour movement that provides support for controls on the inflow of foreigners. The labour movement's acceptance of the right of the British state to control immigration renders its 'anti-racism' inconsequential. In periods of crisis this nationalism can be directed against the immigrant population. Mellish, who sees the British nation as the instrument for solving the capitalist crisis, makes a subtle link between Britain's crisis and immigration. If Mellish does not yet blame the crisis on immigrants, he nevertheless argues that immigrants make the life of 'our tiny island' more difficult. The view which attributes many of the problems facing the working class to immigration is widespread in the labour movement.

The ruling class attack on the black population is facilitated by the nationalism of the labour movement. There has been little working class response to immigration control or to police attacks on black youth. This is because sections of the labour movement see immigrants as a threat to their interests. The NF slogan 'one million unemployed, one million immigrants' draws out the chauvinist logic of Mellish's position.

The view from the bourgeoisie

The bourgeoisie is attempting to solve the crisis of capitalism with the cooperation of the working class. It justifies its demands for sacrifices by arguing that class interests must be subordinated to national ones. The success of the Social Contract indicates that the working class has been prepared to make sacrifices in the interests of the nation. The bourgeoisie appeals to nationalist sentiments in the labour movement — the nation must be protected from a 'flood' of foreign workers — and reinforces the divisions in the working class. The strength of nationalism allows the bourgeoisie to use racial divisions to attack *the working class as a whole*.

Capitalists meet with little opposition to their attacks on black workers. The isolation of blacks from the official labour movement allows the bourgeoisie to use racial divisions to its own advantage. Racial discrimination on the shop floor is widely tolerated by the trade unions.

Throughout Europe white workers have been reluctant to defend immigrants from redundancy, and in a number of cases white workers have sought to save their jobs at the expense of immigrants. The European bourgeoisie has been successful in playing off one section of the working class against another. The backward Swiss Trade Union Federation has played a major role in the right-wing campaign against immigration. So many immigrants have left Switzerland since 1975 that there appears to be very little unemployment: in December 1977 there were only 8500 registered unemployed in Switzerland. In Germany the story is the same: today there are 718,000 fewer foreign workers — 27 per cent less than in 1973. For the German labour movement immigrant workers are beyond the pale of the trade unions. Since 1973 over 2 million foreign workers have been forced to leave the European Economic Community (EEC).

Since the onset of the crisis the British ruling class has intensified its attack on blacks. The racist climate which exploded in 1976 has strengthened

the ideological hold of the bourgeoisie over the working class. The bourgeois policies carried out by the Labour Government have had a drastic impact on the immigrant population. The powers of discretion given to immigration officers have led to the tightening up of immigration controls and to the regular harassment of immigrants. Systematic police attacks on blacks have become an everyday feature of British cities.

Fascism is a force which gives a consistent organisational expression to the national chauvinist currents which exist in all classes in Britain. The NF and its growing influence reflect the strengthening of chauvinism and racism. Racism is the central plank of the NF platform. This should not obscure the threat that racist ideas pose independently of that organisation. For revolutionaries, the NF and its campaign of physical intimidation is only part of the problem. The NF did not invent British chauvinism — it has given it an unambiguous political form.

The historic mission of fascism

The experience of the working class has demonstrated time and again that there is no such thing as 'pure democracy'. Bourgeois democracy is neither more nor less than the preferred political form through which the bourgeoisie exercises its dictatorship. The democratic rights achieved by the proletariat under bourgeois democratic rule are important gains and must be defended. However, the maintenance of bourgeois democracy is dependent upon economic and social stability. In times of crisis and intense class struggle the bourgeoisie can no longer rely on parliament to sustain its class rule. Lenin wrote:

'...the proletariat, on all serious, profound and fundamental issues gets martial law or pogroms...The more highly developed a democracy is, the more imminent are pogroms or civil war in connection with any profound political divergence which is dangerous to the bourgeoisie.' (Lenin, 'The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky', *Collected Works*, Vol 25, p245)

Numerous examples of the overthrow of bourgeois democracy by the bourgeoisie itself have confirmed Lenin's analysis. This course of action is forced on the bourgeoisie by changing material conditions. In order to maintain the capitalist system the ruling class resorts, when necessary to openly repressive forms of state rule.

The necessity for direct forms of coercion arises not from the bourgeoisie's fascination with authoritarianism but from the requirements of capital accumulation. When even its most liberal sections fear the working class, the bourgeoisie does not hesitate to resort to the most barbaric forms of political rule. Reformism fails to understand this. It abstracts democracy from the class nature of capitalist society and operates with a notion of pure democracy.

The abstraction of bourgeois democracy from its class content leads to a confused understanding of fascism. For many people fascism represents a dangerous social movement which is associated with memories of Hitler and Mussolini. Fascism is seen as a disease eroding the political institutions of democracy, a pathological deviation from the bourgeois norm. The conclusion is then drawn that all classes have a common interest in waging a 'democratic' struggle against fascism. This view is superficially supported by the popular understanding of the Allies' war against Nazism.

There is no common interest in fighting fascism which cuts across class

lines. Fascism is not a disease that suddenly attacks the body politic of bourgeois society. It is a political form through which the bourgeoisie attempts to resolve intense class conflict. This bourgeois solution can only be defeated through the struggle against capital.

The development of fascism in Germany and Italy was the specific product of the crisis of European capitalism in the 'twenties and 'thirties. In looking at that period it is possible to outline the main tendencies of fascism in the imperialist epoch.

Fascism arose as the political expression of the inability of the bourgeoisie to resolve its economic crisis. The general conditions prevailing in the world economy and the balance of class forces within the nation state were an obstacle for capital in its search for further profits. Unable to rely on 'normal' methods of maintaining the rate of profit it sought a way out. This provided the foundation for the fascist option. In these conditions fascism was to re-establish the basis for profitable production. In order to bring about the centralisation and concentration of capital and increase the productivity of labour, fascism destroyed the organisations of the working class because they stood in the way of the restructuring of capital.

From the point of view of capital in crisis, there was nothing irrational about fascism. After the defeat of the German proletariat, the bourgeoisie was able to lengthen the working week, increase the rate of exploitation of the working class and push up the productivity of labour through the Nazi regime. It has been estimated that the profits of large German companies rose by 433 per cent between 1932 and 1936. Under the Nazi regime capital was able to raise the exploitation of the working class 300 per cent above that of the Weimar republic.

In order to re-establish a new form of political regime, the ruling class relied upon the mass movement of the angry petit bourgeoisie. Far from being the result of a conspiracy, the mass fascist movement had a solid social foundation. It arose as a result of the economic problems facing certain strata of capitalist society. The intensification of the crisis undermined the social and economic position of small propertied groups, the traditional salary-earners and other sections of the so-called middle class. Together with sections of the peasantry and unemployed workers, these strata formed the social basis for the fascists. Seeing the organisation and militancy of the working class as a threat to its own interests, the petit bourgeoisie turned its wrath against the proletariat.

A prerequisite for the development of a mass fascist organisation was the collapse of the confidence of the petit bourgeoisie in its traditional parties and leaders. Fascism as a mass force could only grow when the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat had reached an impasse, where the proletariat, due to the absence of a revolutionary leadership, was unable to go forward to the seizure of state power.

Historically, reformism acted as a barrier to defeating fascism. Although it attempted to struggle against fascism, it failed to recognise that this struggle was inherently a struggle against the capitalist system of production. In Italy, the social democrats attempted to defend the working class through Parliament while the fascist squads were overthrowing the institutions of bourgeois democracy with the approval of the bourgeoisie. Unlike the vacillating reformist leadership the fascist bands moved decisively onto the streets, attacked the organisations of the working class and in the process

won the desperate petit bourgeoisie to their side. The acceleration of fascist activity during the period of impasse increasingly tipped the balance of class forces in favour of the bourgeoisie. Thus a revolutionary situation was squandered by the reformist leadership, the proletariat was defeated and the bourgeoisie opted for a fascist dictatorship.

Although fascism and bourgeois democracy are two forms of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, it is essential to understand the differences between them. Trotsky wrote:

'These two systems: the one parliamentary democratic, the other fascist, derive their support from different combinations of the oppressed and exploited classes, and they unavoidably come to a sharp clash with each other.

'The Social Democracy, which is today the chief representative of the parliamentary-bourgeois regime, derives its support from the workers. Fascism is supported by the petit bourgeoisie. The Social Democracy without the mass organisations of the workers can have no influence. Fascism cannot entrench itself in power without annihilating the workers' organisations.' (Trotsky, *The struggle against fascism in Germany*, Pathfinder Edition, pp154-5)

The position of social democratic parties derives its strength from the mass organisations of the working class. In Germany and Italy, the precondition for the restructuring of capitalist relations of production was the destruction of these. Under the threat of fascism, the social democrats continued to place their faith in the bourgeois state, rather than in the independent mobilisation of the working class.

The rise of the fascists to power should not be confused with other forms of non-parliamentary rule, such as military dictatorship. It differs from these in that it is based on the political support of a mass movement and therefore does not rely upon coercion alone. Fascism became a mass movement precisely because it appeared to offer an alternative to a large section of society. To talk simply in terms of fascist lies and demagogy is to fail to understand that this apparent alternative can win widespread support. In the past revolutionaries have paid a high price for concentrating on the military aspects of fascism and ignoring its ideological success. Klara Zetkin's warning to the Communist International has contemporary relevance:

'The Italian Communist Party had seen in fascism only a militarist terrorist movement, not a mass movement with a broad social basis which had already won a political and ideological victory over the working class before it came to power in Italy.' (K Zetkin, motivation for the resolution on fascism, 23 June 1923, in J Degras, *The Communist International 1919 - 1943, Documents*, Vol 2, p39)

Having reduced fascism to its military aspects the Italian Communists were not able to offer a *political* alternative to Mussolini. As we will show later, the same mistake haunts the left today.

The separation of fascism from capitalism, or the reduction of fascism to its military aspects, stems from a failure to understand that it is the contradictions of capital in times of crisis which create the basis for fascism. There always exist groups of right-wing extremists who propagate populist, chauvinist and racist ideas. But it is only in certain material conditions that fascist ideas begin to grip the masses and pose a credible alternative to the normal forms of bourgeois rule. The bourgeoisie and its state apparatus grow closer to the fascists and in turn stimulate the development of the fascist movement.

The question of fascism in Britain

The tendency towards fascism today can only be understood by an analysis of the circumstances within which it has developed. Despite the deepening capitalist crisis, bourgeois democracy still provides an adequate form of class rule. The Labour Party acts as an important vehicle for integrating the working class into the institutions of the bourgeois state. Capital's domination of the working class through a bourgeois Labour Party has meant that the proletariat's struggle has been contained by its own leadership. The relative success of the Social Contract demonstrates the continuing viability of this bourgeois strategy.

The capitalist class has no need to encourage fascism when its interests are so successfully pursued by the labour bureaucracy. Even the most militant strikes — such as those of British Leyland workers, Heathrow maintenance workers, the power workers and the firemen — have claimed that their demands constitute a 'special case', not a challenge to the Government's Social Contract. This has enabled the Labour Government to pick off one section of the working class after another.

The cumulative effects of the crisis have provided fascist organisations like the NF with new opportunities. Despite the NF's relative weakness, we cannot be complacent about the political threat posed by the forces of the far right. The rise of the NF is a symptom of the crisis of the British bourgeoisie. The fear and insecurity generated by the crisis have provided the NF with a growing audience.

In the course of the past four years sections of the petit bourgeoisie, small capitalists and the salaried middle class have seen their position undermined. During the year 1974 there was a record number of bankruptcies (1532; see *The Sunday Times*, 5 January 1975) and since then the position of the small businessman has worsened. Unemployment and demoralisation have provided the NF with a limited degree of support from sections of the labour movement. At the 1976 Conference of the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, over a third of the delegates supported a motion calling for a ban on immigration (*Financial Times*, 26 May 1976). The fact that this motion was debated in a union whose members face unemployment in a declining industry shows that its origins are to be found in the capitalist crisis.

Working class support for the NF comes mainly from depressed areas such as East London, areas which have particularly severe social and economic problems. There, problems of housing, social services, and job insecurity provide the NF with a hearing. The NF exploits the fears engendered by economic instability. In declining areas the NF blames real social problems on immigrants, and puts forward its racist propaganda as a solution:

'You know that Islington's Labour Council has a really shocking record for housing our own people. Immigrants have poured into our borough and found accommodation with incredible ease. Some parts of Islington seem almost to have been taken over completely by foreigners and even the shops and businesses are immigrant owned and staffed. Hotels are given over to immigrants awaiting accommodation, staying there at our expense while they wait to move into flats and houses which our people urgently need.' (*Why we need National Front councillors*, leaflet produced by NF Islington branch, 1976)

Using this sort of propaganda the NF has been able to develop a limited base of political support in areas such as Leicester and East London.

The success of the NF has been closely related to periods when racism has come to the surface as an immediate political issue. Events such as the Notting Hill race riots, Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech in Smethwick and the controversy raised by bourgeois politicians over the arrival of East African and Malawian Asians have served to stimulate the growth of the NF. The success of the NF has been based on its racist anti-immigrant campaigns. The campaigns in support of the Ulster Unionists and the Rhodesian Whites, and the campaign against the EEC brought few recruits and little publicity. The inability of the NF to obtain support for its broader policies demonstrates the limited appeal of this organisation; it also indicates that the material basis for a mass fascist movement does not yet exist. However, the ability of the NF to push racism to the forefront of British political life shows the threat that chauvinism poses for the working class today.

It is estimated that the membership of the NF (around 12-14,000) has been stagnant during the past two years. So far, the attempts of the NF to use street demonstrations to widen its base have not been a success. The NF's national demonstrations, which have rarely mobilised more than 1000, have had a tendency to decrease this year.

The organisational stagnation of the NF stands in marked contrast to its electoral gains. In terms of electoral support the NF is the fastest growing political party in Britain. During the general election of February 1974, in which it fielded 54 candidates, the NF obtained 75,870 votes. The total NF vote represented an average of 1405 votes per candidate — 2.3 per cent of the vote in the constituencies that it fought. In six seats (all Labour-held) the NF obtained more than four per cent of the vote. In the October 1974 election the NF ran 90 candidates and increased its total vote to 112,000 votes. Again its average share of the vote was about the same as in February — 1200 votes per candidate.

Since the 1974 elections the NF has been able to obtain increasing support in by-elections and local council elections. In the 1977 Greater London Council (GLC) elections the NF received 119,000 votes. The recent electoral performance of the NF is symptomatic of the demoralisation of sections of the British working class. A significant and increasing proportion of voters is prepared to give electoral support to the party despite its stagnant membership. It has been widely observed that a large proportion of the NF's vote comes from former Labour supporters. This indicates the potential support for the nationalist and racist politics of the NF which exists in sections of the working class. The real danger that the NF reveals is the nationalism of the British working class. The NF's campaign of physical intimidation may obscure the central *political* threat that it poses for the working class. The NF has been able to transform the question of race into a political issue in the labour movement. As a result, the reformist leadership of the working class has made one concession after another to racism. The reformist leadership's policy on immigration has been designed to take the steam out of the fascists' campaign. Former Cabinet Minister Crossman's reflections on his visit to Smethwick in 1970 make this point clear:

'Racialism has been extremely violent in this area but there were many more questions about doctors and nurses and secondary schools. There is no doubt that stopping immigration, which was one of Callaghan's great achievements, has done an enormous lot for us and that in places like Smethwick the racial undertone, which was enormously strong in 1964, is now even weaker than in 1966.' (The Crossman Diaries, Vol 3, p34, in *The Sunday Times*, 20 November 1977)

Callaghan's 'great achievement' was to adapt to racism and stop immigration. In 1977, we can see that Callaghan's antidote to racism has not made this issue disappear. On the contrary, by institutionalising racism, reformism has provided racist politics with a cloak of respectability.

Reformism and racism

Why is it that Callaghan's response to racism was to capitulate to it and join the attack on immigrants, though in a less extreme way? How can we explain the existence of reformist and racist views in the labour movement and the fact that today a section of Labour voters is prepared to support the NF? To answer these questions we must analyse the ideological premises which are common to both racism and reformism.

Marx demonstrated that the strength of bourgeois ideology is due to the way it arises spontaneously out of capitalist production. The fundamental class antagonism which is inherent in capitalist production is obscured by the 'free' and 'equal' exchange that takes place between labour and capital in the market. Since the mode of exploitation of the proletariat is masked by the 'free' exchange between labour and capital ('a fair day's work for a fair day's pay') there appears to be nothing inherently exploitative in capitalist production. Hence the inequalities that exist appear not as a necessary consequence of capitalist production but as something incidental to it. Inequalities are seen as a result of the greed of the individual capitalist, of the way in which wealth is distributed, or of unfair transactions in banking and trade. That is why radical critics of society have always campaigned against the stock market and speculators, against the middle man, or against the excessive consumption of the ruling class. Marx has demonstrated that far from threatening the domination of capital, these redistributionist notions serve to hide fundamental class contradictions.

Because the domination of capital over the working class is indirect and is mediated by a voluntary contract between the worker and capitalist, the bourgeois views about freedom and equality are confirmed in the operation of the market. The economic bondage of the worker is hidden underneath the apparently equal exchange relationships. Therefore the domination of capital over labour can in general be exercised through the operation of the market. It is capital, as social power, that dominates the working class. When capital needs to exercise coercion, this appears as political rather than economic domination: the despotism of capital simply appears as political power exercised by the state. Coercion is not seen as a necessary form of the domination of capital, but as a policy option selected by government. This apparent separation of economic and political domination leads to the view that it is possible to eliminate the political domination exercised by a minority without destroying capitalism. It is these views that provide the basis for the reformist approach.

Reformism ignores the real domination and exploitation of the working class in production and restricts its focus to the inequalities that appear on the surface of capitalist society. (The slogan 'seven per cent of the population own 84 per cent of the wealth' is a clear expression of this standpoint.) Reformism seeks to defend the interests of the working class through obtaining concessions from the bourgeoisie. Reformists do not challenge the existence of capitalist relations of production — they want to modify the

inequality between capital and labour in the latter's favour.

The premise that the working class share of material wealth and political influence can be progressively increased within the capitalist system is the basis of reformist policies. Central to this strategy is the belief that the state can be influenced to operate in defence of working class interests. For the reformists, class coercion by the state is not understood as the political form through which the domination of capital is exercised. Although they will often acknowledge that a certain government acts in the interests of capital against the working class, reformists will always argue that the labour movement, through its parties and unions, can transform the state to work for its own ends. The state is seen as an essentially neutral agency which under working class pressure could serve the interests of the labour movement.

Reformism sees the state as an organ of 'the people' and endorses the concept of the nation as a natural supra-class entity which unites and represents the interests of the British people. Today we can see that British nationalism is a central component of the reformist strategy.

In response to the crisis reformists accuse the capitalists of being unpatriotic because they export capital abroad rather than invest in British industry. The same nationalist theme is emphasised when reformists demand the imposition of import controls. In arguing for these, the reformists want to protect British capitalism from foreign competition. Thus *Tribune* writes:

'Britain simply cannot hope to compete in these labour intensive sectors which many developing nations with ample labour, employable at a cheap rate, are now exploiting. The lesson for Britain is either to toughen up on import controls or to concentrate on capital intensive industries.' (S Kelly, 'A *Tribune* investigation into a dying industry', *Tribune*, 21 October 1977)

In offering advice to the capitalists, the reformists fail to draw out the logic of their economic nationalism — that, for British capital to be really competitive, it needs 'ample labour employable at a cheap rate'. In times of crisis, when the logic of the capitalist system becomes inescapable, reformism inexorably reaches the point where it asks the working class to make sacrifices in the interests of the nation — supplying labour at a 'competitive' rate.

Since reformists accept the nation state and capitalist production relations as natural, in times of crisis they do not question the capitalist system as such but the way in which it is run. It is not capitalist production which is blamed for the deterioration of the standard of living of the working class: instead, the reformists blame the crisis on bad policies, mismanagement, greedy monopolies or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The cause of the crisis is explained by something other than the fundamental contradictions inherent in capitalist production.

In their superficial explanation of the crisis the reformists show their acceptance of the bourgeois world view — a view that is shared by the NF. The NF also blames the crisis on bad policies, mismanagement, the EEC and the IMF. Although its explanation of the crisis places a particularly heavy emphasis on the theme of 'national betrayal', its analysis parallels the distributionist approach of the reformists. Written by an NF member, this letter indicates where the fascists think the problems lie:

'A manual worker myself, I am all in favour of proposals which make life easier for the working class. But if the Labour Party is serious about its aims for improving

the lot of those who face daily drudgery in the factory, office or building site, why in heaven's name do they continue to repudiate those areas where working class ownership is really needed? ...Public ownership of industries and services cannot give real control unless the financial system is in public hands. As long as orthodox socialists ignore this fundamental fact of economic life we will still remain the puppets of finance regardless whatever else they choose to nationalise.' (*Bristol Evening Post*, 5 August 1974)

This letter could have been written by a radical reformist. Depicting the problem of capitalism as one of circulation rather than as one of production, fascists and reformists put forward explanations that are strikingly similar. Starting from a superficial bourgeois viewpoint, both the NF and the reformists advance a *national solution to the crisis*.

The national solution to the crisis

Because they accept the legitimacy of capitalist production and restrict their aims to a fairer redistribution of wealth, reformists are caught in a dilemma at a time of crisis. Capital must attack working class living standards in order to restore profitable production; reformists must choose between their rhetoric about redistributing wealth to the working class, and their acceptance of capital's need to redistribute wealth in favour of the bourgeoisie. The reformists decide to abandon their 'left' positions and ask the working class to make sacrifices in the interests of the nation. Thus Tony Benn argues:

'We must show the British people the way out of the crisis so that we can harness the efforts and enthusiasm of the nation to the urgent task of reconstruction and democratic socialist reform.' (*The Times*, 4 October 1977)

In his appeal to the enthusiasm of the nation, Benn obscures the fact that there is no 'way out of the crisis' for the working class within capitalism. The crisis of capitalism can be resolved in one of two ways: either in the interest of the working class or in the interest of capital. The defence of the working class must be based on the rejection of all bourgeois solutions to the crisis; it must lead to the overthrow of the capitalist system. All the plans advanced to beat the crisis (for example the 'Left Alternative Strategy' put forward by the Communist Party and *Tribune*) pose national — that is, capitalist — reconstruction as the task of the working class.

The reformist solution to the crisis is a nationalist one. As the experience of the Social Contract shows, this strategy subordinates the interest of the working class to that of the nation. The national solution to the crisis seeks to establish class harmony in order to strengthen the British nation. It calls for the regeneration of British industry, without pointing out that in a period of crisis the restructuring of capital must lead to loss of jobs. It blames the rise of food prices on the EEC, rather than indicating that inflation is a consequence of the capitalist accumulation process. It wants to ban the export of British capital without showing that a precondition for repatriating capital to Britain is cutting the real wages of workers. It demands bans on imports and attempts to save the jobs of British workers at the expense of workers elsewhere. In sum, the national solution to the crisis seeks to make capitalism more efficient without spelling out that the preconditions for efficient capitalism are cuts in state expenditure, unemployment and a massive fall in the living standards of the working class.

The popular support for import controls shows the strength of nationalism in the working class. Rather than pursue an independent working class

strategy, sections of the working class seek to unite with their bosses against the danger of foreign imports. The NF simply takes the reformist solution to the crisis a few steps further. Reformist platitudes about the 'interests of the labour movement' disappear under the NF's all-embracing British flag. Agreeing with the reformists, the NF argue 'there is nothing wrong in wanting to protect our own people and our own industries from cheap foreign goods flooding into the country...' (P Gegan, 'The fallacies of economic liberalism', *Spearhead*, August 1977, p10). Appealing to popular prejudice, the NF depicts the crisis of capitalism as the inability of the British nation to assert its will in the face of foreign competition:

'Never mind how many foreign manufactured goods, many of them subsidised or produced by cheap labour, are dumped here, undercutting our own products and driving them off the shelves, out of the shops and showrooms. Never mind how many of our industrialists are forced into bankruptcy, how many factories are closed down or how many people are thrown out of work, liberal trade policies are maintained in the name of free trade. This suicidal policy is enshrined in the Treaty of Rome, which prohibits tariffs on industrial goods entering Britain from the Common Market Countries, as well as in terms of our loans from the IMF.' (ibid)

The difference between the economic nationalism of the NF and that of the reformists is only one of emphasis. The reformists argue:

'The textile and shoe industries have both suffered catastrophically from imports. And there will be more until the government realises what is at stake and is prepared to take more effective measures to stem the tide of imports that has become a flood.' (*Tribune*, 21 October 1977)

The NF will simply concur and draw out *Tribune's* chauvinist logic: why stop at 'stopping the flood of imports'? The argument for import controls, for saving British jobs at the expense of workers elsewhere, leads to support for immigration controls. In the case of the NF even immigration controls are insufficient — nothing less than the repatriation of blacks will save the British nation. When it comes to following the logic of chauvinism to racist conclusions, the NF has no monopoly. In the late 'forties, the TUC felt that national reconstruction meant restricting the employment of East European immigrants to jobs for which British workers were not available. As part of its contribution to national reconstruction, the Communist Party proclaimed:

'All emigration should be stopped for three years until we are through the crisis. I ask you, does it make sense that we allow 500,000 of our best young people to put their names down for emigration abroad, when at the same time we employ Poles who ought to be back in their country and bring to work in Britain displaced persons who ought also to be sent back to their own countries?' (C H Pollitt, *Looking Ahead*, London, 1947, p72)

'Send them back' said Pollitt in 1947; in so doing he spelled out the reactionary nature of reformism. Despite their disagreements the reformists and the NF share a nationalist standpoint — one is just more extreme than the other. The reformists' anti-racism is nothing but empty moralism. Based on a 'Great Britain' and an acceptance of capitalist relations of production, the reformist perspective cannot counter racist arguments. It is this perspective that has led to Callaghan's 'great achievement' of immigration control.

Reformist nationalism cannot offer an ideological alternative to racism. It is only since racism has become an immediate threat to the organisations of the labour movement that the reformist leadership has attempted to

counter its influence. Inevitably, the reformists' own nationalism limits the scope of such steps to appeals to humanitarian conscience. In the summer of 1976, when the exacerbation of racial tensions stimulated the growth of the NF at the expense of electoral support for the Labour Party, the reformist bureaucrats launched an anti-racist campaign. Speaking for the National Executive Committee at the 1976 Labour Party Conference, Joan Lestor boasted that Labour could no longer be accused of keeping a low profile over race problems: 'we are on the offensive and must keep it that way' (*Financial Times*, 30 September 1976). However, this 'offensive' consisted of nothing more than the occasional press conference, one demonstration, and the production of a few leaflets. In the meantime the Labour Government's repressive immigration policy illustrates that reformism can only make concessions to racism but cannot fight it.

Not only can reformism not fight racism: *it is the strength of reformist nationalism in the working class that offers a potential audience for the NF.* John Tyndall, the chairman of the NF, has noticed this. He states:

'When it was a case of fighting Hitler, labour politicians didn't hesitate to stir up people's feeling of patriotism. We see things now in the same terms: we are threatened with invasion, with destruction, and we have to stimulate the will to resist.' (*The Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, 2 October 1977, p7)

The Labour politicians have provided Tyndall with a reservoir of patriotism in the workers' movement. But matters go further. The trade union movement's commitment to defending the rights of workers rarely extends to black workers. Every year the TUC passes resolutions condemning racial discrimination. The contrast between these resolutions and reality was bluntly spelled out by the general secretary of one of the largest unions: 'It's the same with this as with so many other union matters — the bullshit beats the brains every time' (quoted in D J Smith, *Racial disadvantage in Britain, the PEP report*, 1977, p143). From the standpoint of British nationalism, immigrant workers are not really part of the labour movement. The acquiescence of the trade union movement to this view provides the NF with a hearing in sections of the working class.

The Second Imperialist War and fascism

The reformist strategy against fascism during the Second Imperialist World War has important lessons for today. In developing a strategy against racism and fascism it is important that the past experience of the working class is carefully evaluated.

The setbacks that the working class in Europe suffered during the 'twenties and 'thirties threw the labour movement into ideological disarray. Fascism was not seen as a form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie but as a political force that threatened all classes. The extreme forms that bourgeois rule assumed under Hitler and Mussolini confirmed most people in the simple view that fascism is irrational, aggressive and above all anti-democratic. The reformist leadership separated the struggle against fascism from the anti-capitalist struggle. The role of the working class was reduced to fighting for bourgeois democracy. Fought in the name of peace and freedom, the war reinforced illusions in democracy. Bourgeois democracy, which is nothing more than the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, acquired new virtues in the working class. For many in the workers' movement the aim was no longer

socialism but democracy itself.

The class basis of the Second Imperialist War was obscured by the reformist approach which depicted the conflict in terms of democracy versus fascism. The Leninist position — that the working class must struggle against the war efforts of its bourgeoisie and turn the imperialist war into a class war — was abandoned by the official communist parties. They, like the social democrats, argued that this war was a special case; for them this inter-imperialist conflict had become a struggle between democracy and totalitarianism. The communist parties and the other labour apologists for the capitalist war argued that all forms of class struggle had to be postponed until the fight against fascism was over.

The communist parties were in the forefront of those who argued that all class interests must be sacrificed for the national interest. In the United States, the Communist Party advised blacks to forget about the civil rights campaign as it weakened the Administration's war programme. After the 1943 pogroms against blacks in Detroit, the Communist Party urged blacks to forget what it termed the 'so-called race riots', telling them to get back to work immediately. When the development of resistance to British rule in India led to a campaign of civil disobedience in 1942, the British Communist Party (CPGB) took a lead in denouncing the Indian masses because their struggle undermined Britain's war effort. In its role as recruiting sergeant, the CPGB told the colonial peoples that now was not the time to struggle against imperialism. In a statement on the colonies and the war, it said: 'They will understand the need for the immediate building of a great united front for the defeat of Hitler. This takes precedence over every other issue at the moment.'

By supporting the imperialist war, the CPGB and the labour leadership strengthened nationalism in the working class. The war was seen in the labour movement as the fight of the British nation against fascism, a foreign ideology. The dominant view in the labour movement — that 'Fascism is not British' — indicated that the working class had no independent class position on the war.

In making the distinction between the 'progressive' democracies and the fascist dictatorships and in extolling the virtues of democracy and nationalism, the communist parties reinforced the domination of capital over the working class. The movement today still suffers from the destruction of Marxist ideas that occurred during this period.

When the left today attempts to use the experience of the Second World War to fight the NF, it is using the nationalism of yesterday to fight the nationalism of today. The anti-Nazism of the past is far from progressive: it served to mobilise the working class around the imperialist war effort. In evoking the spirit of Dunkirk to fight the NF, the left simply stirs up the nationalist prejudices of the labour movement. The left adapts to the same nationalist sentiments in the working class that are the basis of the appeal of the extreme right. The fascists have not missed the point. The National Party argues:

'Racially, economically and militarily, Britain has been frighteningly weakened over the past hundred years. The British people were victorious in the two world wars, but have lost the freedom and guarantee of national survival for which they have fought.'
(*At last...someone who speaks up for the British*, National Party leaflet, 1976)

Just like the left, the fascists are prepared to use the patriotism evoked by memories of the Second Imperialist War for their own ends.

The left makes the mistake of abstracting the NF from the material conditions that have given rise to this organisation. Labour MP Joe Ashton says: 'The Front has been pinching votes from all parties. They are getting support from 18-20 year olds, people who have never seen the war' (*Evening News*, 8 December 1977). Ashton believes that he can undermine the credibility of a fascist organisation through linking it to the Nazis. But the 119,000 votes that the NF received at the last GLC elections were not the result of a mass infatuation with swastikas and Hitler. The NF appeared to provide a solution to the problems that these voters face. The abstract approach of identifying the NF with Nazism fails to deal with the concrete conditions which stimulate the growth of fascism today. The justification given by the International Marxist Group (IMG) says that:

'The workers movement hates fascism, and rightly so. The Front does not present itself as a fascist party, but cultivates its "respectability" by posing as a workers' organisation through taking up political issues on which workers often quite spontaneously take reactionary positions. By exposing the Front for what it is — a fascist organisation — it is possible to lead the workers movement to question many of its backward traditions by showing how dangerously exposed it actually is to fascist infiltration.' (*Fascism, smash it now! The case for no platform*, IMG pamphlet, p 13)

What the IMG calls 'exposing the Front' means nothing more than associating it with the past deeds of the Nazis. The IMG hopes to draw on the past hatred of Nazi Germany and direct this against the NF. This exercise has nothing to do with confronting the political basis of the NF's support. Rather than challenge chauvinism in today's conditions, the IMG wants to take the working class on a sentimental journey back to Dunkirk.

The experience of the Second World War shows that being anti-Nazi can be consistent with British chauvinism. That is why the Federation of Conservative Students (FCS) can produce 130,000 leaflets equating the NF with Nazism. When the radical left appeals to the anti-Nazi tradition it is bound to stir up memories of how Britain fought the Germans. The radical left has never understood the grave defeat that the working class suffered when it marched for British imperialism. In its use of anti-Nazi slogans such as 'Never Again', the left attempts to turn the reformist tradition of the British working class to anti-racist ends. However, it is this patriotic tradition of reformism that the NF seeks to integrate into its own programme. Just as it is impossible for reformism to fight racism consistently, it is impossible to struggle against racism without confronting the reformist tradition in the British working class.

The left and the National Front

The CPGB

Today the CPGB advances the anti-fascist strategy that it pursued in the Second World War in a new form. Despite its abhorrence of racism, the CPGB shares the same ideological terrain as the NF. Nationalism runs throughout the politics of the CPGB. From its failure to support the struggle of the Irish liberation movement against British imperialism, to its call for import controls, the CPGB adapts to every chauvinist prejudice in the labour movement.

The CPGB accepts the right of the British state to impose immigration controls as long as these controls are 'not racist'. How the immigration controls of an imperialist state can be anything other than racist has yet to be explained by the CPGB's theoreticians. The CPGB does not challenge the fears that exist in the labour movement over immigration; instead it argues that these fears are not warranted by 'the facts':

'The Facts'

Only 3.2 per cent of the British population is black.

Last year 40,000 more people left Britain than came in.

Black people make smaller demands on the social services than white people, mainly because more of them are of working age.'

(CPGB, anti-racist leaflet, 1977)

Accepting the chauvinist sentiments that are widespread in the labour movement, the CPGB is reduced to arguing that the NF has got its figures wrong. It reassured the British working class that *only* 3.2 per cent of the population are black. It tells workers that blacks are not spongers on the social services after all. What would it say if black people *did* make a greater demand on the social services? In its attempts to match the NF fact for fact, the CPGB reinforces the framework that the bourgeoisie has established for debating immigration. The CPGB's 'facts' are nothing more than chauvinism with a human face.

The CPGB is unable to combat the NF. The CPGB's national-reformist standpoint prevents it from challenging the racist ideas that have provided the basis for the growth of the NF. The CPGB can argue against racism only on the basis of humanist ideals – 'One Race the Human Race'. This slogan is nothing more than a fraudulent abstraction which obscures the division of the human race along *class* lines. Rather than approaching the question of racism from a class position, the CPGB looks to the British state to solve the problem. Commenting on Callaghan's speech at the opening of Parliament, the CPGB noted:

'It was good to hear his condemnation of the National Front and the calls for racial harmony. But fine words butter no parsnips. Where was the commitment to use the Race Relations Act to the full in stopping the racist propaganda from the National Front? Totally absent. Where was the promise to strengthen the Act so that racist demonstrations would be banned? Totally absent. (*Morning Star*, 4 November 1977)

The CPGB can only express its dismay that Callaghan has not turned out to be a staunch anti-racist militant. In the best utopian tradition of reformism, it wants the bourgeois state to legislate racism and fascism out of existence. The position of the CPGB on the question of racism expresses the view of a large number of militants in the trade union movement. Based on nationalist premises, this view looks to the state for a solution. For revolutionaries, an important part of the struggle against racism is to defeat this reformist strategy and its attempts to fight the NF with radical nationalism.

The radical left

The organisations of the radical left (the IMG, the Socialist Workers Party [SWP] etc.) are unable to offer a political alternative to the CPGB's approach to the question of racism. The radical left criticises the CPGB for its moderate tactics but it never takes up the CPGB's political approach.

The radical left's criticism is that the CPGB does not go far enough. In this vein the IMG writes:

'Instead of denying the fascists a platform, the CP call for a "broad democratic alliance" like that with church figures in Lewisham, saying that it is by the development of this "political mass action" that the NF will be defeated. We have seen only too well at Lewisham – limiting actions of the Front to that which is acceptable to the church figures – and dispersing the anti-racist forces as soon as the police step in to defend the fascists.

'We too are in favour of political mass action to stop the Front. We too are in favour of imposing a ban on the fascist marches. But we start from mobilising the labour movement to impose the ban. The CP's tailing behind local church figures leads them to ignore this task.' (*Socialist Challenge*, special issue on Lewisham, 1977)

The IMG merely criticises the CPGB's lack of militancy and not the reformist content of its anti-NF strategy. In reality, the CPGB agrees with the IMG that mobilising the working class is necessary if a ban is to be imposed on the NF. As Dave Cook, national organiser of the CPGB, puts it:

'While it is essential to campaign for these events to be banned, it is also necessary to work to mobilise the biggest possible demonstrations to express militant and united opposition.

'A ban on racist propaganda only seems likely when, alongside resolutions and petitions, the mass of the people demonstrate they will drive racism off the street.' (*Morning Star*, 26 August 1977, p2)

Attacking the CPGB on the nature and scale of its mobilisation misses the essential point. The question revolutionaries must pose is whether the CPGB has the political basis for mobilising for an effective campaign against racism. This is the question the radical left never asks; it is merely satisfied to note that it is more militant than the CPGB. The reformist views that characterise the CPGB act as a barrier to the development of an effective anti-racist campaign. The radical left cannot provide a Marxist critique of the politics of the CPGB. Hence it cannot lead a revolutionary struggle against racism.

The commitment of organisations like the SWP and the IMG to the struggle against racism and the NF is unquestionable. Nevertheless, they have failed to deal with the real questions at stake. They have failed to understand that it is the chauvinist traditions of the British labour movement that provide the breeding ground for the NF. Fascism cannot be fought simply by calling for opposition to fascism; it can only be fought by developing a strong internationalist current in the working class. The narrow concept of 'anti-fascism' determines the strategies of the radical left. Despite the various tactics advanced on this question, the radical left groups have one common feature: *an inability to grasp the need to fight reformism as part of an anti-fascist strategy*. The radical left attempts to mobilise against the NF on the basis of the existing consciousness of the labour movement.

The inevitable consequence of this narrow 'anti-fascism' is the separation of the struggle against racism and chauvinism from the fight against the NF. Racism is taken up only rhetorically, for the radical left's arguments against the NF rest on parallels with the Nazis. The radical left emphasises the distinctive features of the NF, its extreme racism and violence, rather than its nationalism and opposition to immigration – ideas which are widespread in the labour movement. Once the NF's political characteristics are reduced to those of a Nazi organisation, all that remains to be done is to smash it. In justifying this position the radical left offers the horrors of Nazi Germany

as proof. This timeless anti-fascist formula has the virtue of simplicity, if not effectiveness. The bankruptcy of the radical left's strategy is revealed in its position of 'no platform for fascists'. This position is justified by the radical left on the grounds that the NF is a violent and racist organisation. It *separates* the nationalism and racism of the NF from the nationalism and racism of reformism. The central problem – the chauvinism shared by the labour movement and the fascists – is ignored by the radical left; instead it restricts its focus to the extreme racism of the NF. This concentration on fighting the NF as an organisation provides no challenge to its ideological appeal. The SWP argues:

'The Nazi leaders of the National Front are faced with a major strategic problem. They have succeeded in attracting a considerable protest vote, especially from working class voters disillusioned with Labour, suspicious of the Tories and willing to blame the blacks for all the problems under the sun. But the membership attracted by the NF's racism is very different from the hardened Nazi cadre that Tyndall and Webster need in order to succeed.' (A Callinicos & A Hatchett, 'In defence of violence', *International Socialism*, No 101, 1977, pp27-8)

The radical left concludes that by preventing the NF from marching and speaking, it will prevent ordinary racists from being transformed into 'a hardened Nazi cadre'. This position never addresses itself to the tasks of challenging the view which 'blames the blacks for all the problems'. In its abstract presentation of the problem that the NF represents, the radical left avoids confronting the chauvinist views of reformism. The 'no platform' position draws attention to the excesses of the NF's politics whilst leaving the ordinary racist to another day.

The radical left believes that support for the NF can be scared away by physical and organisational tactics. For revolutionaries confronting fascists is one aspect of the defence of the working class and other oppressed sections of society. But fascism cannot be defeated at this stage by pre-emptive physical action; it is a product of a particular political and economic climate and can only be defeated by the political struggle of the working class. This demands a relentless ideological and political campaign against racism and chauvinism. By diverting attention away from the everyday, drab chauvinism in the labour movement, the 'no platform' position actually hinders this struggle. The radical left denies that it separates the struggle against fascism from the struggle for socialism and it claims to have a political alternative. In practice however the political struggle against the NF is left for the future. This is how the Central Committee of the SWP sees the problem:

'The way to stop the Nazis altogether is to build a mass movement for real socialism that offers working people in this country a genuine alternative to continued crisis and appeals for sacrifice, whether from Labour or Tory governments.

'But we can also obstruct the Nazi menace – by stopping them today. By demonstrating that thousands of socialists and trade unionists are not going to "turn the other cheek" we will impress on any who may have the slightest sympathy for the fascist ideas of the NF Nazis that these ideas are dangerous.' (*Nazis off the streets*, 13 August 1977, statement handed out for Lewisham mobilisation, SWP Central Committee)

Here we can see that the 'way to stop the Nazis altogether' bears no relationship to the Lewisham mobilisation. Incapable of waging a political campaign against racism, the SWP shows that NF ideas are 'dangerous' with

its fists. The split between today's struggle and the socialist struggle — the split between the minimum and maximum programmes — is characteristic of the politics of reformism. For revolutionaries, physical violence is an integral part of a political strategy. In seeking to mobilise against the NF without attempting to transform the consciousness of the working class, the SWP is merely demonstrating its subservience to spontaneity. Lenin wrote:

'The economists and the present day terrorists have one common root, namely, *subservience to spontaneity*; the economists bow to the spontaneity of the "labour movement pure and simple", while the terrorists bow to the spontaneity of the passionate indignation of intellectuals, who lack the ability or opportunity to connect the revolutionary struggle and the working class movement into an integral whole.' (V.I. Lenin, 'What is to be done?', *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p418)

In bowing to spontaneity the SWP reduces the struggle against racism to skirmishes with the NF. This can only have disastrous consequences for the working class.

The left, racism and the bourgeois state

The confused response of the left to the dangers of racism can be seen in its attitude to the bourgeois state. Revolutionaries have always understood that racism cannot be fought through the state machinery. The attempt to use the state to fight racism can only reinforce the prevailing view that the state can defend the interests of the working class. Revolutionaries can demand that the Labour Party places its resources behind the struggle against fascism and the defence of the gains won by the working class; but they cannot call on the bourgeois state to defend these rights. As revolutionaries we fight for the democratic rights of all oppressed strata. Today it is essential to campaign for the abolition of legal discrimination such as the racist Immigration Acts: in this way we fight against the state's discrimination and oppression of the black population. But this struggle for democratic rights has nothing in common with the reformist approach of relying on the state to fight racism. On the contrary the struggle for democratic rights involves a fight against the state. This is why the struggle for democratic rights can only be waged from a revolutionary perspective. The fight against immigration control requires a determination to challenge the bourgeois state, for a consistent struggle against racism will inevitably come up against its coercive powers — both legal and physical.

In response to reformist pressure the bourgeois state is quite prepared to promise that it will fight racism. One such promise is the Race Relations Act. The aim of this type of legislation is to curb the more excessive forms of discrimination. In theory this legislation makes the incitement of racial hatred a criminal offence. But we should not be surprised that legislation passed by the bourgeois state provides no weapon against racism. Race relations legislation merely provides a channel through which capital's oppression of blacks can be regulated.

Reformists believe that this legislation can be used to fight racism and the fascists. That *Tribune* seeks to legislate fascism out of existence is indicated by MP Frank Allaun:

'The way to stop the National Front is under the Race Relations Act. Democratic socialists believe in freedom for all political parties — Left, Right and Centre. What we do *not* believe in is freedom to incite racial hatred. New legislation is not required;

under the Race Relations Act racial incitement is a crime.' (*Tribune*, 30 September 1977)

Frank Allaun's faith in race relations legislation is shared by the CPGB. The CPGB for its part wants to turn the Home Office and the police into anti-fascist fighters:

The Communist Party in Leicester has argued that it does not wish to see restrictions on democracy and free speech, but also, that the Race Relations Act is quite specific: the incitement of racial hatred is a criminal offence...The task of the anti-racist movement is to ensure that the Race Relations Act is properly enforced...The job of the anti-racist movement...is to ensure that the police and Home Office are bombarded with complaints about the racist character of the manifestation of the ultra-right.' ('How Leicester pushed back the Front', *Comment*, 3 April 1977, p312)

The national-reformist approach of the CPGB leads it to pose the enforcement of the Race Relations Act as the 'task of the anti-racist movement'. It offers the dead end strategy of pressurising the racist state to fight racism.

The approach of sections of the radical left is a variant of the reformists' anti-racism. Organisations like the SWP and the IMG have called for bans on NF demonstrations. Both the SWP and the IMG welcomed the ban imposed on the NF march in Tameside. The SWP conveniently forgot that its march was also banned and called for a *victory* demonstration (see *Socialist Worker*, 24 September 1977).

Under capitalism neither fascism nor racism can be legislated out of existence. Fascism arises out of the contradictions of capitalism, and in periods of intense class conflict the bourgeois state — no matter what government is in power — draws closer to the fascists. In calling for bans the radical left is cutting its own throat. All limitations on democratic rights under capitalism, whether in the form of bans or proscriptions, are sooner or later directed against the working class. The bourgeois state inevitably uses its coercive power — physical and legal — against its class enemy, the proletariat. Trotsky wrote:

'Under the conditions of the bourgeois regime, all suppression of political rights and freedoms, no matter whom they are directed against in the beginning, in the end inevitably bear down upon the working class, particularly its most advanced elements. That is a law of history. The workers must learn to distinguish between their friends and their enemies according to their own judgement and not according to the hints of the police.' (L. Trotsky, *Writings 1939-40*, pp132-33)

The IMG has discovered from the events at Tameside that the bourgeois state is just as likely to ban working class demonstrations as those of the fascists. The IMG position on the bans takes the Tameside experience into account and argues that it only supports those bans which are directed against the fascists. In the best tradition of British jurisprudence the IMG indicates the sort of legislation it wants as the basis of the bans:

'The fascists are not in Tameside to defend "free speech", but to attack the right of a racial minority today. . . . For that reason a specific ban against the fascists under a clause of the Race Relations Act or an anti-racist clause of the Public Order Act itself cannot be opposed on the basis of some abstract principle.

'This is not what has happened in Tameside. A non-specific clause has been used to ban everyone.' (*Socialist Challenge*, 6 October 1977, p4)

We can now see the rhetorical nature of the IMG's criticism of the CPGB. At the end of the day the IMG can only repeat the CPGB's 'specific bans' in a

more radical form. In terms of legal cretinism the IMG goes beyond the CPGB. It has even found an 'anti-racist' clause in the Public Order Act which it 'cannot oppose'. For the IMG the problem with the Tameside bans was that the wrong clause was used to ban the NF. If an 'anti-racist' clause had been used instead it would have been an unambiguous victory for the working class. In haggling over the form of state coercion it would like to see exercised against the NF, the IMG carries opportunism to the extreme. By relying on the state machinery, the IMG and SWP legitimise the right of the state to impose restrictions on certain forms of political activity.

The position of the IMG and the SWP on the bans stems from their radical bourgeois politics. Unable to advance a strategy based on a Marxist analysis, their politics change from day to day in response to immediate events. Their approach is no more than a radical reflection of the state of the labour movement — it can never transform the existing consciousness of the working class by giving it a revolutionary direction. Unable to counter the dominance of bourgeois ideology in the labour movement, the radical left capitulates to it, failing to advance a strategy to defend the independent interest of the working class.

The logical product of the radical left's narrow 'anti-fascism' is the Anti-Nazi League. Monotonously repeating how different the NF is from other organisations, the radical left draws the conclusion that all other organisations may have a common interest in fighting the NF. In November 1977, this shortsighted approach led sections of the radical left to support the establishment of the Anti-Nazi League — an all-class alliance formed to campaign against the NF. In the words of one of its supporters, *Socialist Challenge*:

'The sponsorship for the campaign is broad, involving over 30 left MPs who see the campaign as "an alternative to street-fighting" Even Liberal and Tory MPs who feel they should unite against the Nazis are invited to join the campaign although whether they would extend their support for a campaign of action seems dubious.' (*Socialist Challenge*, 17 November 1977, p2)

As during the Second World War the nation's finest sons and daughters have united against fascism. The class character of the struggle against racism is obliterated under the moralistic slogan of 'Never Again'. The narrow and abstract 'anti-fascist' politics of the Anti-Nazi League are spelled out by its secretary, SWP organiser Paul Holborrow:

'We want firstly to inform people, as many people as possible what exactly the National Front stands for, and secondly to encourage them to take up actively the campaign against the Nazis.' (*Socialist Worker*, 19 November 1977, p7)

On occasions when sections of the radical left are not calling on the bourgeois state to ban the NF they call on bourgeois politicians to unite with them for the purpose of disseminating information.

The Anti-Nazi League is the opportunist corollary of the radical militancy of the 'no platform' position. Both lines of approach are equally distant from the struggle for socialism. As an all-class alliance the Anti-Nazi League does not even pretend to relate the fight against the NF to the struggle for socialism. *The warnings issued by the radical left about Nazism serve to reconcile British nationalism with anti-fascism.* In the Anti-Nazi League the working class has no independent role to play. Incapable of struggling for internationalism in the labour movement, the radical left resorts to

patronising working class youth. The Anti-Nazi League leaflet for school students advances the pathetic slogan – ‘The Nazi NF means No Future, No Freedom, No Fun’. But a strong dose of liberal moralism will not win school students to an anti-fascist position: instead of telling students that they will have no future with the NF, revolutionaries point out that they have ‘no future’ *today* under capitalism.

The radical left’s all-class opposition to fascism is just what the bourgeoisie likes. Pointing its finger at the ‘extremist’ NF, the bourgeoisie can maintain its ‘moderate’ chauvinism intact. Thus we find that Tory deputy leader Whitelaw is only too happy to demonstrate his anti-Nazi credentials. In launching the FCS anti-NF campaign, he stated: ‘at a time when the Front is making every effort to recruit young people into its ranks, it is vital that young people themselves show that they will have no truck with the evils of religious or racial discrimination’ (*The Guardian*, 8 November 1977). Whitelaw, who called for strict immigration controls at the 1976 Tory Party Conference, and who presided over Operation Motorman in the Six Counties of Ireland, is against the NF. He has an open invitation to join the Anti-Nazi League. Blacks who are brutalised by immigration control and the Irish who are tortured and maimed by British imperialism will be glad to know that the Anti-Nazi League disseminates good information.

The militant posturing of ‘no platform’ has the same political content as the Anti-Nazi League’s search for bourgeois anti-fascist patrons. Trotsky’s warnings need to be repeated today:

‘The very concepts of “anti-fascism” and “anti-fascist” are fictions and lies. Marxism approaches all phenomena from a class standpoint. Azana (a radical petit-bourgeois politician – FR) . . . is “anti-fascist” only to the extent that fascism hinders bourgeois intellectuals from carving out parliamentary or other careers.’ (L Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, Pathfinder, p339)

Sections of the radical left have abandoned the class standpoint required of Marxists. The IMG is not concerned with the political basis of the struggle against racism but with how broad the movement is. The IMG can say of the Tories ‘Whatever their motives, the FCS campaign could broaden the anti-racist campaign. Their tactics, however, are totally insufficient’ (*Socialist Challenge*, 8 December 1977, p8). In its quest for ‘broad’ campaigns the IMG is reduced to criticising the tactics of the bourgeoisie.

The abstract anti-fascism of the radical left abandons the struggle for an independent working class strategy. It accepts the domination of national reformism over the working class and tries to fight the NF by appealing to the conscience of reformism. This ‘anti-fascism’ does not go beyond moral outrage and can in no way defend the interests of the working class and oppressed strata.

What are the tasks for revolutionaries?

The perspective of abstract anti-fascism is a consequence of the inability to develop a strategy based on scientific socialism. The radical left does not go beneath the extreme forms of racism and chauvinism – it directs its tactics at what it sees as the immediate problems. Its empiricist approach prevents it from seeing the connection between the NF and the dominant trends in the labour movement. Whatever the radical left’s motives, its inability to distinguish between a bourgeois reformist and a revolutionary approach to

fascism means that opportunism always has the last say.

Our analysis of racism and fascism in Britain today reveals that the dangers facing the proletariat cannot be restricted to the threat posed by the NF. The ability of the NF to attract support from former Labour Party voters indicates the political weakness of the labour movement. The dominance of reformism in the working class means that it has no strategy that is independent of bourgeois influence.

The struggle against racism in the labour movement can only take place through the training of a working class vanguard. Today revolutionaries must arm politically advanced workers with a Marxist understanding of the questions facing the working class. There are no short cuts to the achievement of this task. Militancy alone will not lead the working class to oppose racial discrimination or to question the role of British imperialism in Ireland. Even those workers who have begun to question the reformist strategy of the Labour Party will not spontaneously question the right of the British state to control immigration. The role of revolutionaries is to ensure that the spontaneous opposition of workers to aspects of the reformist strategy is transformed into a conscious class opposition to British imperialism. Through this process a vanguard will emerge which is able to respond to all forms of oppression from the standpoint of proletarian internationalism. For the Revolutionary Communist Tendency the fight against racism and the NF is inseparable from the task of training a vanguard.

The NF poses two specific problems to which revolutionaries must address themselves. Firstly, it gives an organised political expression to racist and other reactionary views and hence has strengthened chauvinism in backward sections of the labour movement. Secondly, the NF presents a physical threat to blacks and the left.

Workers' defence

The most immediate issue posed by the NF is the need for workers' defence. The black population must be defended against the wave of physical attacks. However, the immediacy of this task should not make us forget that defence is a political question. Blacks have organised various forms of self defence to counter the physical danger to their survival. These are important steps in challenging the threat posed by racists. But while these measures are necessary, they provide only the first steps in countering the danger posed by racism. The physical danger faced by blacks stems not merely from the NF — not every racist attack on blacks is carried out by the fascists. The systematic attacks mounted by the police also pose a serious threat. The physical danger faced by blacks stems from the strength of racist sentiments in British society. The existence of racism creates the possibility of pogroms with or without the NF. This is why the question of defence must be related to the struggle against racism.

As the crisis deepens and the barbaric tendencies of capitalism come more to the fore, the question of defence will take on an even more important dimension. Minorities will only be defended when the working class is won to an independent class position. As long as black people are isolated from the labour movement, they will be vulnerable to racist attacks. Workers have to be won *politically* to provide physical support for the defence of the immigrant communities. Appeals to human kindness and fairness do not show

workers the need to defend the immigrant population. The lack of working class response to the state's vicious 'anti-mugging' campaign demonstrates that the reformist conception of 'fair play' does not extend to the immigrant population. It is the national-reformist sentiments of the labour movement which have led to the isolation of the black community. This consciousness cannot be mobilised for anti-racist ends — it must be transformed through the struggle for the establishment of a proletarian vanguard.

For a political struggle against racism

Our approach to workers' defence indicates that even this elementary step must be based on a struggle for working class independence. In the absence of a working class vanguard the NF has been able to act as a reactionary pressure group on the labour movement. By giving a clear political expression to chauvinist sentiments in the labour movement, the NF is able to reinforce the ideological fragmentation of the working class. The NF can exercise this influence because its conceptions already exist in an embryonic form: the nationalist traditions of the movement provide the breeding ground of fascism.

Racism cannot be fought merely on the basis of militancy. Militant trade unionism does not spontaneously lead to an internationalist position. Slogans like 'Black and White Unite and Fight' beg the question. The attempt to unite the working class in the struggle against fascism without challenging the existing consciousness of the movement will have partial results. The precondition for unity is the struggle of the vanguard for independent working class politics.

The central task is to struggle for proletarian internationalism in the labour movement. Racism and nationalism cannot be fought in the abstract. Nationalism in the labour movement crystallises around concrete political questions, questions which the NF itself takes up. Immigration, Ireland, the EEC and import controls — these are issues which reformists consider to be above class interests. Reformism and chauvinism must be fought by taking them up, for they are the issues on which class lines appear most blurred, and which therefore provide the potential for the NF to grow.

The struggle against racism has to be directed against the bourgeois state. Workers will not be won to an anti-racist position so long as they accept the right of the state to control immigration and the right of the police to harass the black population. Revolutionaries must demonstrate to politically advanced workers that the state cannot be used to defend either blacks or the working class. In our propaganda we have to show that an imperialist state is of necessity racist and that with the intensification of crisis these tendencies will be strengthened.

The RCT insists on the primacy of the struggle for proletarian internationalism because this approach alone can destroy the nationalist breeding ground of fascism. Today the labour movement's support of Britain's domination of Ireland is in general implicit; but as the tendency towards inter-imperialist rivalries is strengthened chauvinism may take on more explicit political forms. Unless revolutionaries develop a strong internationalist current in the workers' movement potential support for the NF will be transformed into actual political support for right-wing chauvinist ideas.

Racism cannot be effectively challenged without a struggle against all expressions of chauvinism and reformism. This is why the struggle against racism must be conducted from a revolutionary perspective. At present it is

not possible to win the mass of the working class to this position: the struggle for revolutionary internationalism must begin with the development of a vanguard from amongst the most advanced workers. An important step in this direction is to challenge the far right on its home ground. Through taking up questions such as the domination of Ireland and the oppression of women it is possible to train a revolutionary working class leadership.

The fight against the NF must be conducted by combatting the specific arguments put forward by the fascists. Abstract calls against the fascists are politically irrelevant. People support the NF not because it is fascist but because it appears to have answers to their real problems. *Spearhead* and other NF publications consistently discuss major political issues. Through articles on the EEC, inflation, the crisis, trade unions, housing, the family, education, Ireland and immigration, the fascists attempt to show the relevance of their strategy to the problems facing British society. Their strategy will not be defeated by evoking images of concentration camps. When the fascists argue that the IRA must be smashed, or that sexual permissiveness must be eradicated, they do no more than address themselves to views that already exist in the labour movement. When they organise demonstrations for import controls they are giving political coherence to a strategy that has strong support in the working class. Telling trade unionists not to support the NF because it is fascist is trying to fight today's NF with yesterday's memories.

The racist ideas of the NF cannot be challenged simply through anti-NF activity. Many liberals will denounce the NF without being prepared to confront racism. Yet this unpopular issue must be at the centre of any serious anti-fascist strategy. For the RCT the campaign against immigration control provides the main axis for combatting racism in the labour movement. The struggle against racism will only have practical consequences if it contributes to the development of a working class movement of opposition to the racist immigration laws. This is how it is possible to advance proletarian internationalism in a practical way. Opposition to all immigration controls is a necessity for the defence of the *entire* working class. The precondition for this development is the recognition of the common interests of the international working class against capitalism.

The struggle against immigration control cannot be left for another day. Immigration control confers legal respectability on racism. In failing to conduct a campaign against immigration control, the left accepts the legal divisions that the bourgeois state has imposed on the working class. The inactivity of the labour movement in this area has allowed the NF to take the offensive. While sections of the labour movement may react to particular instances of racial discrimination, only class conscious workers will question the right of the state to control immigration. Yet everything stands or falls on the development of a class conscious opposition to immigration control. Unless anti-racists adopt this political strategy they will be reduced to shadow boxing with the NF.

The revolutionary movement will not make a single step forward unless the defence of blacks is placed at the centre of its programme. The training of a revolutionary vanguard today is inseparable from the struggle against racism and conversely the development of an internationalist current in the working class is the only effective defence against the NF. The task facing the

revolutionary movement is to build a campaign based on the standpoint of proletarian internationalism against all forms of immigration controls.

Frank Richards

January 1978

Afterword to the second edition

This afterword provides an opportunity to develop a number of points contained in *Under A National Flag*. The events of this year have confirmed that the NF has no monopoly on racist politics. Under the pressure of the capitalist crisis, bourgeois public opinion has come to voice the essentials of NF propaganda. The *Daily Express* can now argue:

'What we want from the Tories are practical ideas for cracking down on illegal immigration, stopping all "amnesties", and encouraging, where possible, a fair amount of agreed repatriation. Labour could follow suit. We need to tackle this problem, and not in a mean or partisan spirit.' (*Daily Express*, 16 January 1978, p10)

In the interests of 'Britain' the major parties took up the call. On 30 January Thatcher called for a tough approach to immigration and warned that 'this country might be swamped by people with a different culture'. 'Nonsense', shouted the Labour Government. In order to demonstrate that it never wavers from defending Britain's interests, Home Secretary Rees denied that the Labour Government was 'soft' on immigration – the country was not in danger of being 'swamped' by immigrants. To prove that he meant business, Rees announced that in 1977 he had signed over 1100 deportation orders and that 500 'illegal entrants' had been 'removed'. Shortly afterwards the Parliamentary Select Committee Report on Immigration recommended the tightening up of immigration controls. Committee members from Tory right-winger Dudley Smith to Labour 'Marxist' Sydney Bidwell stood shoulder to shoulder in this bipartisan approach.

The assault on blacks launched by responsible politicians in Parliament was accompanied by a series of physical attacks on the Asian and West Indian population. From Brick Lane to Wolverhampton physical intimidation of the black population has become part of everyday life. The black community is under constant threat not only from card-carrying NF members but also from ordinary British racists and the police.

Many on the left have come to realise that their 'anti-fascist' tactics are not adequate to the task of fighting racism. But they have yet to understand that these tactics are in fact an obstacle to the struggle against racism. The left still focuses its campaigns on exposing 'Nazism' and is powerless to confront racism in its contemporary form. While the labour movement is almost unanimous in its opposition to the NF, not *one* significant section of the trade union movement has pledged its opposition to immigration controls. But the radical left has a different standard against which to measure its achievements, for in its new role of impresario for radical rock concerts it has made considerable gains. The organisational success of the ANL, and in particular its massive Carnival in April, have reinforced 'anti-Nazism'.

In political terms the ANL's carnivals and discos have provided an outlet

for the frustration and anger of youth. The ANL has given no direction to young workers but has only told them what they already suspected — that 'Hitler was bad' and 'rock is fun'. It came as no surprise to school kids that black bands play good music. Yet while their older mentors pontificated at the recent ANL conference about the sort of carnivals they will be organising against the 'Nazis', racist intimidation continues unabated.

The politics of the ANL are bourgeois through and through. It is not the social composition of the ANL that is the problem but its political foundation. As the tired Stalinists of the CPGB remark, it is the sort of 'broad' campaign that they used to build in the 'thirties. The ANL's campaign is based on respectable bourgeois 'anti-fascism'. Evoking the bombing of 'great cities like Coventry and London', ANL leaflets attempt to turn British patriotism to progressive ends. As we argued before, this 'anti-fascism' is not only unable to fight racism but also reinforces the nationalist traditions of the labour movement.

The radical left argues: 'Yes, we know the ANL is far from perfect, but it is a beginning'. The ANL is a broad front and principled politics can, it seems, be argued for elsewhere. While it offers bourgeois 'anti-fascism' through the ANL, the left seeks to salve its conscience by periodically advancing something 'stronger'. But even when rhetoric against immigration controls is used, the most backward arguments are brought in. The SWP attempts to argue against immigration controls by demonstrating that the racists have got their statistics wrong. In its recent pamphlet it reassures the public that 'in fact, *immigrants are a benefit to the economy*' (*The case against immigration controls*, p6, our emphasis). Slightly uneasy at this concession to bourgeois opinion, the SWP attempts to cover its tracks:

'Many black people will feel that it is insulting and degrading to them even for socialists to argue about the immigration and birthrate figures in the way we have done. Why shouldn't black people enter the country freely and have as many children as they want? And they are absolutely right. It is, nonetheless, important to let people have the facts on this issue.' (ibid, p5)

But the bourgeoisie also has 'the facts on this issue'. *The Economist* can agree with the SWP's facts but draw different conclusions. Pointing out that 'anyone advocating a cut in immigration cannot argue that Britain is getting more and more overcrowded, for the population of this island is, at least for the time being, going down' (*The Economist*, 18 February 1978, p22), it can still go on to support immigration controls. Racism is not about getting your facts straight. The SWP deals with racism as if it were a technical matter; it adapts to the reformist consciousness of the labour movement and seeks to win opposition to immigration controls on the basis of common sense. While the SWP can mobilise an inoffensive ANL demonstration on this basis, it cannot transform trade unionism into a force against immigration controls.

The significance of the ANL is that it represents the limit of the radical left's 'anti-fascism'. Unable to challenge the dominant political views of the labour movement, the left seeks to reconcile anti-racism with reformism. This approach can take two forms: physical confrontation with fascist-type organisations or an ANL-type propaganda bloc aimed at exposing the 'Nazis'. Although superficially there appears to be a world of difference between the Lewisham confrontation and the ANL, in essence both initiatives are based on the same narrow 'anti-fascism'. In both cases the radical left is powerless

to combat racism because it skirts around the problem of reformism. It intuitively recognises this by refusing to commit itself to a serious campaign against immigration controls.

For all its emphasis on militancy, the radical left cannot politically distinguish itself from the anti-racism of the reformists. Let us look at this 'anti-racism'. Dave Cook, national organiser of the CPGB and prominent supporter of the ANL, puts the reformist case clearly. First, he recognises the right of the bourgeois state to control immigration as long as this control is not racist: 'we should recognise that the government has the right to regulate immigration and emigration . . . but not by racist criteria' (*Morning Star*, 20 June 1978, p2). Having advanced the notion that the immigration controls of an imperialist state can be non-racist, Cook articulates the reformist concern for the survival of the nation:

'All of us on the left understand that unemployment and worsening social services result from *the economic crisis of British capitalism*. However, the "no immigration controls" position puts forward a demand which can easily create the impression that the left are oblivious to these problems.' (ibid)

In other words, let's not go too far. We socialists know it is a crisis of capitalism but, realists that we are, we can't afford to offend nationalist sensibilities. If we were to oppose immigration controls our credentials as British nationalists would look weak.

This is the voice of reformism. Many on the radical left would find Cook's formulation totally unacceptable. But despite its subjective intentions, pragmatism forces the radical left to draw the *same* political conclusions as the CPGB. Both are agreed that the only practical way forward is to build the ANL. Dave Cook argues that '*to demand an end to all immigration controls shifts the emphasis of the campaign away from the immediate issue, on which it is possible to build the greatest unity, with a greater chance of success*' (ibid). The same calculation informs the method of both the SWP and the IMG. The IMG wants the ANL to be a 'broad single-issue organisation' (*Socialist Challenge*, 4 May 1978, p2). The single issue turns out to be the bourgeois issue of 'anti-Nazism' — a standpoint entirely consistent with British racism. The left never seriously considers the issue around which it asks the working class to unite. It calls for unity against the 'Nazis', but not for class unity.

The anti-racist strategy that the RCT proposes centres around confronting the radical nationalism of left-reformism. Comrades who seriously want to fight racism must look at the record for themselves. It is not simply that left-reformists do not go far enough. They themselves are the mouthpieces of radical nationalism. Sydney Bidwell's support of the racist Select Committee Report on Immigration did not constitute a 'betrayal': he was merely being true to the programme of left-reformism. Nor is there anything inconsistent in Bidwell's patronage of the ANL. It is the subjective aims and the political strategy of the radical left which are inconsistent.

The history of the British labour movement shows that the left-reformists reinforce the national divisions in the international working class. The Labour Party is a pro-imperialist party which has consistently treated black people from the point of view of the British 'national interest'. The left of the party accepts the racist divisions imposed on the working class and advances an 'enlightened' version of imperialist oppression. The Labour left are the 'nice' imperialists. Listen to them — Crossman, Foot and Mikardo — as they advance

their left alternative in the famous post-war manifesto *Keep Left*:

'Once we give up the attempt to hold the Middle East by force, we can concentrate our manpower and resources on the African development which should be our main colonial responsibility in the next twenty years. . . .

'It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of European Socialism depends on the success of our combined colonial policies in the African Continent.' (*Keep Left*, London, 1947, p44)

Today the 'future of European Socialism' turns out to be Labour's hypocritical accommodation to the Smith regime in Zimbabwe and its refusal to condemn the invasion of Kolwezi by Belgian and French imperialism. It is these views which have provided the breeding ground for the NF and other racists. It is the Labour Party that has given nationalism and 'enlightened' imperialism a coherent expression in the labour movement. It is the same party that presides over Britain's colonial war in Ireland today. Racism in the labour movement cannot be fought if the role of the Labour Party is ignored — but the radical left has drawn the opposite conclusion. Indeed the IMG even envisages fighting racism through the Labour Party:

'For the success of the ANL has been due to its ability to mobilise tens of thousands of young people. This must continue. However, for building in the labour movement, an equally important task is to cement the alliance with members of the Labour Party.' (*Socialist Challenge*, 6 July 1978)

Every effective blow against racism will come up against the resistance of the Labour Government. This is what the events at Grunwick and in the East End show.

Racism is one of the most important questions facing the working class. The RCT will unite with any force that is seriously prepared to wage a campaign against immigration controls. We will work with anyone who is prepared to struggle for workers' defence of the black community. Communists must make opposition to immigration controls a central issue in the coming elections. They must advance this issue in order to win workers to the defence of black people. The experience of the past six months has demonstrated that racism can only be fought from a class point of view.

Frank Richards

August 1978

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