

WHAT IS FASCISM?



Sometimes people label any right-wing politician or figure of authority that they dislike a "fascist". On the massive anti-war demos that took place around the country this year, some people even called Tony Blair a "fascist". The threat posed to ordinary people by a pro-business Labour government is not the same as that posed by an organised

fascist movement led by the likes of the British National Party (BNP).

Fascist parties use reactionary ideas that are prevalent within society as a whole - such as nationalism, racism, religious sectarianism, and homophobia - to provide them with a unifying ideology. But so do many other parties - meaning that you cannot, for example, identify a party as "fascist" solely on account of its hostility to immigration or its promotion of "traditional family values". It is what fascist does, and not just what it says, that makes it dangerous.

To take immigration as an example - racist politicians of the mainstream parties whip up anti-immigrant hysteria and then propose the "solution" of restrictive immigration laws to deal with the "problem". Fascists conduct and/or encourage a guerrilla war against immigrant communities by individual racists and gangs of racist thugs.

Fascists don't just try to win elections - they try to build a movement that violently attacks, terrorises, intimidates and harasses convenient scapegoats for the failures of the capitalist system. It is out of this movement that fascism hopes to construct fighting

squads to attack the organisations of the working class as a whole - such as trade unions, anti-racist organisations, socialist and communist parties.

Fascism needs to be seen on the streets and project an image of "strength" to be able to grow. As BNP leader Nick Griffin said in 1993: people backed "what they perceived to be a strong, disciplined organisation with the ability to back up its slogan 'defend rights for whites' with well directed boots and fists."

Who it attracts

Fascism appeals primarily to those layers of society made desperate by social crisis and insecurity, and who are outside of the two major social classes: the working class and the capitalist class. It attracts the likes of small businessmen, shopkeepers and the self-employed who are fearful of an organised working class but are also jealous of the wealth and privilege of the bosses. It targets and attracts the unemployed and other marginal "underclasses" - like the white youth on the run down council estates in Burnley and Oldham - who are easily convinced of its poisonous hatred and prejudice (made legitimate by the mainstream politicians); who are looking for radical solutions to their problems; and who are eager to blame their miserable situation on the nearest available scapegoats.

Fascism also attracts those who the "official" workers' movement has abandoned or failed to provide hope to. When it is on the rise as a movement, it can even attract a section of the working class - the least organised section of workers who are attracted by its strength and disillusioned with the weakness of the trade union leaders and the betrayals of Labour and "socialist" governments, like Jospin's government in France.

It does so by presenting itself as an anti-establishment movement and likes to cloak itself in left language as well. So today the BNP, for example, says

things like it is against selling off council houses to "private capitalist landlords".

Immediate danger

The immediate danger we face from the likes of the BNP is not that they will take power. It is that they will grow, presenting a physical threat to ethnic minorities, leftists and the more radical sections of workers in struggle - such as militant trade unionists - and dividing the workers along racial lines.

Ever since the BNP has focused on Burnley and Oldham in the north of England, racist attacks have been on the rise there. Gangs of racists have rampaged through Asian neighbourhoods smashing up local shops. Pubs which refused to ban Black and Asian people have been burnt to the ground. Black and Asian people have been driven from their homes after vicious campaigns of racial hatred.

In Bermondsey, south London, the National Front (NF) regularly hold marches under the slogan "keep Bermondsey white". Although the more recent marches have been rather small (40 or so people), in the 1970's similar marches attracted thousands of fascist supporters.

At the moment fascists like the BNP may seem to be just focusing on elections. But this is part of a strategy of using elections and electioneering to garner support and to make themselves look like a normal, "respectable", democratic party. Winning seats in parliament and local councils not only helps make them look respectable but it gives them an opportunity to use such positions to spread their racist lies and set the agenda for the "respectable" politicians. Just witness David Blunkett's calls for "integration" and complaints about "swamping" in the wake of race riots in Britain and Le Pen's election victory in France.

fascist regimes

BNP: Prepare for the 2004 elections

The elections on May 1st showed that the BNP is a growing threat. The British National Party stood a record 212 candidates - 3 times the number in the council elections last year. It tripled its number of councillors in England from five to 16.

The BNP's best result came in Burnley where it won eight seats - up five, making the BNP the second largest group on the council, where they will sit for four years with real power over local policies. Victorious Burnley candidates gave nazi salutes as they left the count. A BNP spokesman was oozing triumph, "Last time we kicked the door open. This time we have kicked through it." Nick Griffin is already rubbing his hands at the possibility of winning a majority and outright control of the council in next year's elections, when most councils are up for re-election due to boundary changes. He thinks the BNP will "snowball".

Labour is to blame. The government has created the poverty that the fascists feed on. As factories have closed and the local economy collapsed in many Northern cities, Labour has done nothing to defend jobs or halt unemployment. Tax cuts for big business are matched by cuts to the NHS, schools, and services. The poor get crumbling housing estates and rising taxes - council tax has risen by 13% this year on average!

Labour's national policies of poverty and scapegoating refugees have raised the temperature of racism everywhere. The Labour-controlled councils in Oldham and Burnley, where they have scored best, have opened the door for the fascists. The councils have made a policy of segregating the two communities all the way down to the schools, which means that the communities have no common experience of living with each other. Government cuts in funding for education and services mean that communities are pitted against each other to compete for the crumbs.

After the riots in 2001 the Oldham council even agreed with the racists lies that the Asian community was getting special treatment with extra funding - though they are the poorest areas in Oldham. The council, with Home Office Secretary David Blunkett's approval, shifted money back to white areas! Before the 2003 elections Oldham Labour MP Phil Woolas claimed that Labour had to be "even-handed" and fight racist attacks against white people - this only weeks after an Asian taxi driver was murdered in December. This just legitimises the BNP's lies that most racist attacks are against white people, and covered up by the "liberal media". Labour councillors, and trade union leaders, said they would refuse to work with the BNP before the May 2002 council elections - and then backed down when 3 BNP councillors were elected.



Racist BNP on the march

Only a militant movement of the local community in Burnley can drive the fascists out of office. This is something that New Labour will never do.

● We must build support in the local trade union movement for council workers to

refuse to work with the BNP councillors.

● We need to mobilise the workers movement to organise defend all those who fight back under fascist attack, such as the Asian youth of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford.

● We must fight Labour's poverty policies by direct action - like rent strikes on impoverished estates, school occupations, campaigns to fight for funding - as the way to create an alternative to the BNP.

At the same time a militant anti-fascist movement must also confront the fascists directly and break up their stalls and rallies that spread the lies of race-hate. That is the only way to roll them and their race hate back off the streets and into the sewers.

But looking at the examples of Germany, Italy and Spain, which all had fascist governments, we can see what a fascist regime looks like in power. The mass murder of millions of Jews, Roma, socialists, communists, trade unionists, gays and lesbian is well known. But what is not so well talked about is the complete stamping out of all democratic rights. Every independent organisation that was not state sanctioned was outlawed, especially trade unions, other political parties and even the boys scouts.

But more than just that, the fascist regimes created a system of government control that was used to stop any independent organisation of workers and young people. All of this was done under the guise of protecting the nation but in reality it was about protecting the rule of capitalism. All the major German and Italian firms made a fortune under the fascists. Workers couldn't organise themselves to fight against their exploitation at work for fear of the secret police.

This is another distinguishing feature of fascism - it is the party of civil war against the working class both in its methods and its objectives. Whenever the ruling class has allowed fascism into power, it has been because the bosses could not fool and rule the workers any longer through the usual "democratic" machinery or repress and defeat them through one or another form of military dictatorship. Ordinary bourgeois politicians use the state against the working class.

Fascism acts independently of the state and uses a section of the masses - organised under its leadership - to penetrate, crush, divide and atomise the working class more efficiently than any "normal" dictatorship could. So it was no surprise that when the bosses in Italy, Germany and Spain were facing a massive social crisis and the threat of a workers revolution was just around the corner, they turned to the fascists like Hitler and Mussolini to save capitalism for them.

what to do about it

That is why we can never give the fascist like the BNP any room to grow. We need to organise all anti-racists and anti-fascists, trade unionists and democrats into a campaign to crush them before they can grow. This means not allowing them to organise, driving them off the streets whenever they try to march, and closing down their public meetings. We must smash their every attempt to meet and organise themselves.

But ultimately to get rid of the fascists once and for all means getting rid of the racist system that gave birth to them - capitalism.

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organising to
beat fascism

Anti-BNP picket at Goldsmiths College

About 300 anti-fascists confronted just four members of the Nazi BNP when they arrived for the local election count at Goldsmiths College, New Cross on Thursday evening May 2. Most of the protesters were students from the college and they were supported by members of Goldsmiths UNISON and by other local socialist activists.

The first attempt by the Nazis to enter the college proved unsuccessful as dozens of protesters confronted outside the college gates and forced them to beat a hasty retreat a quarter of a mile back up the road. Even though police reinforcements were called in, the demonstrators still managed to close in on the Nazis as they were escorted through the college car park. In the ensuing skirmish one Nazi blockhead was arrested, one was knocked to the floor and was seen crawling about on all fours in the flowerbed while another one "legged it" back the way he had just come! Eventually the police were able to get two rather dishevelled Nazis into the count. **Ayesha from Goldsmiths**



REFUGEES ARE WELCOME HERE

FAR RIGHT ON THE RISE IN EUROPE

" Well we've had quite a bit of luck in that newspapers have become obsessed with the asylum issue. I have not been able to believe the Daily Express. Issue after issue, day after day, asylum this, asylum that. So we now have the luxury of banging on people's doors with the mainstream issue of the day... It has legitimised us. We are mainstream now."

- Simon Darby, elected BNP councillor in Dudley in May 2003

The tabloid press and the mainstream parties - Labour especially - have turned refugees into scapegoats, blaming them for everything that is wrong with Britain and implying that most are "bogus" and welfare cheats. The result is deadly. At least 4 asylum seekers have been killed since January 2001 in racist attacks. But Labour keeps demonising refugees, saying this is the way to defuse the racist backlash that

they created in the first place!

Refugees are victims of global capitalism. Some flee persecution from dictatorships, others flee grinding poverty for a better life. It is the banks, multinationals and governments of rich countries like Britain that have devastated third world economies and sold arms to the regimes that torture and murder.

The only way to save jobs and fight for better housing, hospitals and schools is to get organised and fight Labour and the bosses - not blame refugees. There are no borders for big business, money, goods or the rich - why are there borders for working class people? Everyone should be free to move where they want.

Refugees are welcome here!
No immigration controls!

The far right isn't just growing in Britain. Across Europe, politicians are using racism to get votes and divert people's attention from the real cause of poverty.

Many of these parties aren't fascist parties but racist populist parties. They call for an end to immigration. They link racism to a whole range of right-wing issues like crime, calling for more cops, prisons and discipline in schools. But no matter how disgusting their rhetoric is, their strategy is to stand in elections and win seats, like a mainstream politician from the Conservatives, Liberals or Labour - not building terror on the streets. They are racist parties.

They are different from fascist parties like the BNP and Le Pen's Front National (FN) in France. The BNP and FN may not be openly fascist, but the organisers at their core and leaders are. They see this new-found "respectability" as a stage, to be used for as long as it is useful.

That doesn't mean that the racism of the mainstream parties (and their nasty populist little brothers) isn't dangerous. By making racism respectable, they open the door to the fascists, making their ideas look mainstream and okay. By trying to compete over who can look the hardest on asylum seekers, they create a race to the right that the fascists benefit from the most.

These far right parties are winning elections across Europe, often joining coalition governments where they can turn their racist ideas into laws. In France last year, Le Pen came second in the presidential elections, scoring 18% of the vote! These parties can grow very quickly - the List Pim Fortuyn came second in Holland's parliamentary elections in May 2002 and joined the government. It was formed only 3 months before! This shows how quickly the fascists could grow, if we don't create an alternative to their hate.



ORGANISING TO BEAT FASCISM

The BNP successes in recent elections are a wake up call to the working class and the left. They show the potential for fascism to grow in the months and years ahead.

New Labour is responsible for this growing threat. It's love-in with the global corporations has meant increasing deprivation, poor housing and crumbling services, breeding despair among the poorest workers.

What's worse, New Labour is whipping up racism, not fighting it. It has scapegoated refugees, Muslims, and the Asian community for not "assimilating." Labour ministers have even used the racist's language, with Home Secretary David Blunkett saying Britain's schools are being "swamped" by asylum seekers' children.

Fascism thrives on racism, and New Labour is making racism respectable. Labour's policies are helping the fascists.

But despite the council seats the BNP won, the fascist movement is still small. We can outflank it and crush it before it grows big. The courageous, mass resistance to the fascists and their police protectors by Asian youth in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham in 2001 shows this potential. The Asian and Black youth, united with thousands of workers and the radical anti-capitalist movement, has the ability to crush the BNP on the streets and their skinhead counterparts in the NF.

a working class response

An obvious first step to take against the fascists is to expose their lies and propaganda. The fascist leaders of the BNP now wear suits and ties, trying to pose as "respectable" everyday racists. Ripping off the mask of the BNP and showing their criminal records and Hitler-worshipping politics is important. We need to get our own message out too, countering their racist lies about asylum-seekers. But this won't be enough to stop the BNP or the National Front (NF), when the mass media and mainstream parties fill the airwaves and newspapers with the same urban myths about scrounging refugees and soft-touch Britain. What's more, the fascists don't build themselves on words alone - they use intimidation and attacks to build their strength, beat down their opponents and terrorise immigrant communities. We need to be able to defend our movement, and respond in kind.

We need a workers united front against fascism as the basis of the movement. This means anti-fascist, anti-racist, community, trade union, youth and anti-capitalist organisations must all come together into one mighty force to throw back the fascists every time they try to meet, march, campaign or stand in elections. We must deny the fascists any platform to spread their views. That means mobilising as many people and organisations as possible to meet the BNP on the streets. As part of this we will need well-organised teams of activists capable of dealing physically with the fascists, on their own terms - only this can make the slogan "no platform" really mean no platform. Such teams need to be organised by the movement and under its control, not separate from it. The fascist gangs can and must be stopped - BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.

The BNP is organising in the Northern town to put the Asian communities

under siege. Well-organised community defence is essential. Yet when it is organised and the fascists are dealt with, as the youth did in Bradford, the police and courts target the anti-fascists! The police protected the NF, and attacked the anti-fascists protesting in the city centre, taking back Manningham street by street with tear gas and truncheons. The courts gave Asian youth sentences 3 times as long as those of the nazis that were attacking their communities in Bradford. David Blunkett backed the long sentences.

Against the likes of Blunkett and the Telegraph, it is vital that the anti-fascist movement supports community self defence. The entire workers movement should back - and help to build - vigilant self defence organisations.

will the state to help us?

These aims sum up the working class response to fascism - a self organised, self reliant and united fightback. The whole history of organising against fascism shows it is wrong and dangerous to call for the state to ban fascists. Even if a fascist march is banned, the ban will apply equally (indeed mainly) to us. The Burnley ANL carnival has been banned 3 years in a row now, whilst the BNP Red, White and Blue "festival" goes ahead with police protection. We need to organise to defy such bans, not call for them!

Why is this? Because the capitalist state regards the working class, the left and the black and Asian communities as a bigger threat, so it will come down harder on us than the fascists. The fascists stand for law and order and more police - we campaign against deaths in police custody. The fascists are against the trade union movement, which organises strikes and that at key moments has confronted the police with militant picket-line defence, such as the Miners' Strike in 1984. They don't want to allow such any anti-racist, working class force to develop - they know it ultimately will threaten their power.

Most anti-fascist campaigns, such as the ANL and Searchlight magazine, support state bans. This makes it easier to parade celebrities, MP's, and church leaders as sponsors, but these people would run a mile from a mass, militant movement that effectively dealt with the BNP and NF. They will prove fairweather friends as such a movement grows. Only the working class - Asian, Black and White - through our own organisations and activity can defeat the threat of fascism. To spread the illusion that the racist, capitalist state can do this hinders our own anti-fascist movement!

fight for Socialism!

Whilst it is vital that we smash fascism, it is also necessary to remember how the BNP have been able to grow as a result of disillusionment with mainstream politics. People no longer believe that Labour is in any way interested in fighting for the needs of millions of ordinary workers and students. Now is the time to call for the building of a new workers party, supported by the unions, to create a genuine political alternative to New Labour. Such a party could give a fighting, class answer to every issue the BNP hijacks - bad housing, school closures, NHS cuts, unemployment, poverty. It could link these struggles to the struggle to get rid of capitalism, by adopting revolution as the goal, not just winning seats in parliament to pass a few toothless laws.

Ultimately, fascist organisations will continue to appear and to grow for as long as there is poverty, oppression and prejudice for them to prey on. The root cause of fascism lies in capitalism and the bosses' exploitation. To banish fascism from the face of the earth forever, we need to overthrow the system in a global revolution, and organise society in a way that poverty and class are eliminated and the human race united.

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