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Bash The Fash: Anti-fascist recollections 1984-93

This is literally a no-punches pulled account of Anti Fascist Action's fight against fascism in Britain by a grassroots anarchist member of AFA. It is important, not because he makes any pretence at being a leading light but because the many small (or not so small) contributions such people make are key to the success that AFA achieved.

Written with honesty and a sense of humour, the tale of challenging the fascists for control of the streets – and winning – never descends to political cliché or reads like a pools forecast.

Obviously, a changed political environment requires different tactics from the anti-fascist movement, but it's equally clear that, if we don't record our recent success (because it is the success of AFA that changed the landscape,) our enemies will write us out of history. Here's an insight into the true story.

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“Visceral, uncompromising and unashamedly confrontational... a brief yet exhilarating view of life at the sharp-end of the anti-fascist struggle during the 1990s.” *Labour History Review*

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What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is a political theory which opposes the State and capitalism. It says that people with economic power (capitalists) and those with political power (politicians of all stripes left, right or centre) use that power for their own benefit, and not (like they claim) for the benefit of society. Anarchism says that neither exploitation nor government is natural or necessary, and that a society

based on freedom, mutual aid and equal share of the good things in life would work better than this one.

Anarchism is also a political movement. Anarchists take part in day-to-day struggles (against poverty, oppression of any kind, war etc) and also promote the idea of comprehensive social change. Based on bitter experience, they warn that new 'revolutionary' bosses are no improvement: 'ends' and 'means' (what you want and how you get it) are closely connected.

1. Introduction

Writing these words I am acutely aware of my small contribution to the history of anti-fascism. I'm sure I have forgotten many incidents, but even so this little booklet of anti-fascist activity must look very slim compared to the volumes certain people I know could fill with their experiences. Nevertheless, I think it can be useful for the 'small fish' such as myself to chronicle these events, warts and all, in case nobody does it and then the history would be lost, or distorted by right-wingers or liberals.

By crushing the fascists at an early stage I think it is reasonable to assume that Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) has prevented numerous racist attacks and even saved lives. For if the fascists were given the chance to freely march, sell their papers, and appear as a respectable political force they would just grow and grow. Fascists' number one aim while they are growing is to appear to be respectable and rational, but, to quote Matty Blagg 'fascism does not start with gas chambers, but it ends with them'.

One criticism sometimes aimed at anti-fascists is that we are from 'outside the area'. In a tight-knit place like Brick Lane this is often true. On the other hand, neither do the fascists have very large numbers in any particular area. They bring people in to consolidate their forces, as we do, as the police do. In an ideal world local communities would rise up and expel the fascist menace, etc. etc. But in the meantime we shall have to tackle them. It is a delicate subject though, because various lefty groups have a history of arriving in certain areas, patronising the locals, making the situation worse, then pissing off when the shit hits the fan.

I am not a violent person by nature. I do not enjoy the idea of walking up to strangers and punching them, even if they are fascists. It is just something that needs to be done. I've had enough scary moments to realise that I am no braver than the next person.

Nor do I possess the gift of the gab, as some anti-fascists do. I wish I did, because on some occasions that can be more effective against fascism than a good left hook. I really admire those people who stand up to them alone at places like football grounds or in their High Street. These verbal put-downs, often with passers-by looking on, are just as humiliating to a fascist as a kick in the bollocks.

Anti-fascism involves risk. Risk of getting a battering from fascists and risk of arrest. Most of us have been arrested at least once. Dealing with the legal system is invariably time-consuming, expensive and stressful. Getting sent to prison can mess up your whole life if you have a good job, home and/or dependents to consider. Nevertheless, quite a few anti-fascists have done time and come out with spirits unbroken. Three members of Red Action got a total of 11 years for

throwing the notorious fascist Nicky Crane through a bus shelter. Other anti-fascists attacked a National Front march (uphill and outnumbered!) in Yorkshire and each got a few years chokey. Several other comrades have been banged up for lesser periods.

The most important thing with anti-fascism is to show up. There are a thousand excuses we could give to other people and ourselves, so I believe the hardest part of anti-fascism is getting out of bed. It is a fact of life that in a punch-up two people can nearly always beat one, so numbers on the street are critical. Even if we have two small anti-fascists against one massive nazi skinhead the anti-fascists can win if they attack from two sides at once, preferably armed with something heavy!

Despite saying that, I must admit that for much of the 1990s I have given excuses and not shown up for many of the call-outs. To be honest I cannot afford to get arrested again. I got caught and fined in 1985 and 1986, and in 1989 I got 150 hours 'Community Service'. The magistrate made it clear that the next time I got caught it would mean a prison sentence. I have two young children now and a working wife. If I got sent down my wife would have to give up her job that pays well and she enjoys. This is the classic situation of *if you can't do the time don't do the crime!* So fear of legal action has more-or-less stopped me getting involved in the fisticuffs side of anti-fascism. This is ironic from the view that in the Second World War people were given medals, for fighting against the nazis and fascists. Fortunately fascist activity has declined in the 1990s (probably temporarily) thanks in part no doubt to them getting battered so much in the 1980s!

2. Us...

To be fair, a great deal of the credit for the militant anti-fascism in the 1980s and 90s deserves to go to Red Action. Thanks to a Red Action initiative Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) was formed in 1985 which brought together the Direct Action Movement (DAM), Red Action, Workers Power, and various other groups and individuals. Red Action were striking terror into the hearts of British fascists years before I started, and were still doing it years after I became inactive. I can't say I agree with all the finer points of their politics, but I will always have massive admiration for their anti-fascist bravery and dedication.

Red Action had concentrations of membership in North London, Manchester and Glasgow, and were better organised to mount national activities. However, anti-fascist activities in Liverpool, Yorkshire cities, Bristol, Norwich and elsewhere were overwhelmingly dominated by local anarchists. Also anarchists, in particular the DAM, were the first to question the motives and tactics of the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* (See Appendix 1).

I belonged to the DAM, an anarchist organisation, with some excellent anti-fascists in it. The DAM has a proud record not only concerning anti-fascism, but also supporting striking miners, printers and others. I could wax lyrical about the fine comrades I have come to know and respect in the DAM, but why give MI5 any clues? You know who you are. However, on AFA call-outs when the DAM would muster 5-20 combatants then Red Action would normally field three times that number. So we were normally the 'junior partner'.

However, I believe the DAM's input into AFA was crucial for two reasons. Firstly, while various lefty and independent groups drifted in and out, only the DAM's presence gave credibility to AFA being a 'broad church' instead of merely a front for Red Action. Secondly, the DAM's physical-force policy helped save the anarchist movement from its complacency and woolly-liberalness towards fascism. For decades prior to the DAM most anarchists were pacifists, hippies, academics and had beards.

A comrade added-up the numbers at one of our biggest events (the 1991 Unity Carnival I think) and counted 120 Red Action, 60 DAM, 20 Workers Power, 8 Class War and a few 'independents'.

Without a doubt AFA contained the best anti-fascists of our generation. AFA is of the same calibre as the anti-fascists in the Spanish Civil War, The 43 Group, the Cable Street veterans, and the Italian and French anti-nazi partisans. I feel honoured to have met and befriended some of the most genuine, warm and brave people in Britain.

Nearly all those involved in physically confronting the fascists are socialists or anarchists. As such we are revolutionaries opposed to capitalism and its governments. Our long-term aim is of course to confront the government and

the employers in order to bring about a free and fair society. In the meantime it is not bad practice to beat the crap out of a few miserable fascists, and if we can't do that what chance would we ever have against the main enemy?

The best anti-fascist combatants are those with the most 'bottle' (nerve), not necessarily those with the biggest physiques. Some of the incidents over the years still make me chuckle at their audacity. For example when Red Action battered some National Front members in Central London, saw them taken to St. Thomas's Hospital, waited for them outside, then battered them again!

Some aspects of anti-fascism are undoubtedly a good laugh. But it is also satisfying to be doing something really useful instead of arguing about political theory or dreaming about utopia. Another plus side is that strong friendships develop among comrades who have shared dangerous moments together.

3. Them...

Fascism the world over is essentially a middle-class ideology based on nationalism, capitalism, obedience and snobbery. British fascists express this ideology by hating whichever minority is convenient at the time. Fascists appear to have no knowledge of what the word 'scapegoat' means. They usually harp on about their Christian credentials and so hate Jews, ignoring the fact that Jesus and the disciples were all Jewish. They usually hate immigrants, ignoring the fact that all British people are descended from one immigrant group or another. They usually hate trade unions, ignoring the fact that life without them was "nasty, brutish and short". They usually hate homosexuals, ignoring the fact that probably ten per cent of their membership are gay. They usually hate Irish Catholics, ignoring the fact that most European fascists sympathetically regard the Irish Catholics as the 'Nationalist Freedom Fighters'. They usually hate Indians and Africans, ignoring the fact that if all the English who have emigrated to Asia and Africa (and Australia and America) came back there would be about 100 million more people squeezed onto this island. And in modern times they usually hate asylum-seekers ignoring the fact that right-wing policies like theirs caused all the problems in the first place.

To be honest I don't think you can ever reason with fascists. They believe, in their hearts, in inequality – as we believe, in our hearts, in equality. Maybe it is something we learn on our Daddy's knee. It is like the foundation of your personality which few people ever change, and no amount of skilful argument will alter. Our job is simply to keep the fascists disorganised and defensive, not hope to convert them. Nevertheless, a few ex-NF have come over to our side, and they tend to become the best type of anti-fascists.

British fascists themselves seem to be a proper hotch-potch of weirdoes, paedophiles, social misfits and egomaniacs. These are the sort of people who (to

quote Jeremy Hardy) think being born white is some kind of achievement. They are always struggling to unite their forces, then having splits because there are too many Chiefs and not enough Indians (well you know what I mean!). It is odd that they always go on about being 'tough with law and order' because by that criteria half their membership would be in prison.

It must be said that the fascists don't have a very good record in the courage department. They often like the skinhead haircut, bomber jacket and Doc Martens to look hard, but they rarely 'walk the walk'. Of course large groups of them like to attack vulnerable targets, but if they expect some opposition they are not so brave. At Hyde Park once three coachloads of them (ie 100-150) jumped off their buses and came screaming towards 20 AFA comrades who stood their ground. As the fascists got nearer some started to lag behind, then the leaders slowed to a jog, then a walk, then they just stood at a distance shouting abuse until the police arrived. Wankers.

Nevertheless, the various fascist organisations still manage to attract quite a few lads who like having a ruck. They are very useful to the capitalist system particularly in times of industrial strife (divide and rule). Throughout the world fascist groups are used unofficially by governments and/or employers to attack trade unionists and human rights activists. Look for example at Northern Ireland, Turkey, Guatemala, or even Tottenham 1995 (JJ Foods strike – see Appendix 2). Despite the smallish size of the fascist parties they do have a massive knock-on influence over the policies of the large mainstream political parties all over Europe, whether in power or out. The mainstream parties adopt half of the policies of the fascist parties in order to steal their thunder, and to placate tabloid editors – scruples don't come into it! In 1979 Thatcher adopted half the policies of the National Front and promptly got elected.

As a teenager, open to new ideas, I once bought a copy of National Front News from a cheerful skinhead outside Borough tube station. I had a good read, and found it interesting that their opposition to American nuclear weapons in Britain coincided with mine. The idea of belonging to something a bit dangerous and controversial is quite attractive to some people. There is the possibility of a bit of action, and people do like to fight for a cause to give their lives some meaning. So it is easy to see how the Far Right could look exciting to rebellious youngsters.

Another appeal of fascism is that it seems to give 'power' to the average down-trodden white geezer. This power can be expressed formally in marches through multi-ethnic areas, or informally by gangs of fascists or racists roaming about looking for isolated black or Asian people to attack. They even glory in these cowardly attacks and call them 'Anti-Mugging Patrols'. Never mind that its ten pissed-up lads against one or two school-kids or pensioners. If they go

unchallenged they soon feel that they 'own' the local streets, ie that it is their manor, and that mentality encourages them into more attacks.

It is the prevention and control of this situation that AFA tackled. Whenever we heard that the fascists were mobilising for a march, public meeting or other event we would also mobilise, often at very short notice, and attempt to give them a pasting. The idea was that they would not feel safe to walk the streets. Iron bars, wooden poles and bricks were sometimes used, but generally just fists and boots. This usually resulted in just cuts and bruises, but more importantly damaged their delusions of grandeur and fragile macho egos.

The fascists have no fear of the larger middle-class socialist groups such as the SWP, RCP, WRP, The Labour Party, etc. I could quote a hundred examples of those organisations' cowardice and hypocrisy. So I suppose it is ironic that the fascists and the real anti-fascists (ie us) are united in our contempt for trendy lefties.

4. Maidstone, 1984

My first anti-fascist demonstration was in Kent in 1984. I heard at the London Workers Group (a mish-mash of anarchists, communists, etc.) that the National Front were marching through Maidstone the following weekend, and that there would be a counter-demo. I had no idea what to expect and didn't know anybody else going.

So on the day I caught the train down there and started wandering around town. From a poster I found out there was a Labour Party-led march to 'oppose' the NF. I joined that because I didn't know what else to do. I was bitterly disappointed after we trudged round town and it became clear that the Labour Party march was not going to try to stop the fascists, but purposefully marched around the other side of town to avoid them, then finished with a rally near the cattle market in the suburbs. At the rally a load of boring speakers ranted on about the evils of fascism etc etc which is all obvious anyway, then they advised everyone to go home. About a hundred people were still sitting on the grass so I stood up and said that we should go into town and look for the fascists. About half-a-dozen people agreed with me, so we set off for the town centre again, a bit nervous I must admit!

We wandered around the middle of Maidstone for a while then a beautiful thing happened. As we were walking down a wide road behind some shops we saw a group of about 20 lads coming towards us. Somehow we twigged that these were anti-fascists like us and we met up in the middle of the street with loads of smiles and greetings. It reminded me of those photos when the Russians met the Americans while fighting the nazis! I don't know who the other group were, but I have since wondered if they were Red Action. In any

case, they had information where the fascists would be, and now our combined force created a good morale boost. So we all set off, keen as mustard, to intercept the NF march.

We got to the route and saw them approaching about 100 yards away. I think there was about two hundred of them with their banners, union jacks, etc. I was very surprised to see a punk amongst their front rank, because I had always assumed punks were anti-authoritarian and so not inclined to fascism. The whole march was escorted by loads of police on foot, and a police van led the way.

We all stood in the middle of the road to block the march. When the front of the march was about 30 yards away the leading police van driver floored his accelerator and drove straight at us. We had to dive out of the way, but someone could easily have been killed. In this way the police assisted the fascists to march through a peaceful English town.

Later the NF were given police protection to make speeches from the bandstand in a local park. Mingling in the park were all kinds of people, some booing and jeering, others decidedly shifty. Eventually the police put the remaining fascists into police vans and gave them a lift to the train station – how sweet!

5. Oxford Street, London, 1984

This was my first proper involvement with Red Action. We (DAM) arranged to stick with them to harass an NF march that was going through London's West End. The NF got police protection so we hung around the fringes shouting insults at Ian Anderson, Joe Pearce, et al. (See Appendix 3). Later we were in the pub when scouts reported that a couple of the NF's leaders were walking down Oxford Street. Two comrades and myself went and found them. It was a classic stand-up fight in the middle of the road – a bit like you see in those old pictures of boxing. Eventually the NF blokes legged it and half managed to get into the back of a moving taxi while we were still hitting them and trying to drag them out. The taxi driver sped off leaving us three laughing, with one comrade holding the collar of one of the fascists jackets! (There were references in the next issue of *Red Action* about how that fascist {Steve Edwards?} would need to make an urgent visit to his tailor.)

Only a minute later, as the three of us were walking down the pavement back to the pub, a police van screeched to a halt about 10 yards in front of us and about eight cops leapt out and ran straight towards us. 'Shit, shit, shit' I thought. 'Somebody has phoned them up'. It became one of the happiest moments of my life as the cops raced past us, not realising that us three walking casually were the ones they were after!

6. Bury St. Edmunds, 1986

This was a watershed for me because I ran away at a critical moment. I was deeply ashamed of that for years, but I eventually realised that we all make mistakes and the point is to learn from them, and not do it again.

The NF were having a march through the town allegedly to protest against the local American Nuclear base and against immigration. Presumably they wanted more British nuclear bombs instead of American. This was ironic because all the lefties and anarchists in Britain were also against the American nuclear bases, but for different reasons!

We took three minibuses of anti-fascists from London, and others arrived from all over England, plus there was some local opposition to the NF in Bury.

The fun started when some of our lot found a few fascists arriving at Bury St. Edmunds train station. They got battered and one of our Liverpool comrades managed to nick the watch of Derek Holland, then an NF bigwig, before he hit the floor. This caused us some amusement afterwards about the stereotyping of scousers!

While we walked back to the town centre the police arrived in vans, blocked the road, and searched us one-by-one. Various of our comrades had screwdrivers, stanley knives and suchlike on them. It was comical to hear the coppers with strong Suffolk accents say "Why is this spanner (for example) inside your jacket?" The reply would always be "I use it at work". Then the cop would say "OK, off you go". So nobody got arrested there for having an offensive weapon, even though this was a weekend and we all lived about 100 miles away!

Later the NF march got underway. A certain DAM comrade, being mad or brave, went alone to abuse them, so I went along to help him if he needed it although I was secretly hoping he would come back to the main group of anti-fascists. The march came by and my comrade methodically counted how many marchers were on it. After he had a total (about 65 I think) he started taunting them at the top of his voice "65 ha, ha!", "You can only get 65? Pathetic!" "Call yourselves the representatives of England with only 65 people? You tossers!" etc. etc. I was standing next to him wishing he would shut up as I was convinced we were going to die. But my comrade really was a brave man with an excellent tactic, because his lone abuse really humiliated the fascists who were undoubtedly embarrassed that there really were only 65 of them. (When I say '...was a brave man...' the operative word is *was*. A few years later, thanks to heroin, he threw away a brilliant mind and a body as strong as an ox.)

Later, as the NF march proceeded through the town the main group of anti-fascists started to attack. Half a dozen of us went into a building site just as the march was passing and lobbed loads of bricks over at them. Some hit cops too.

The fascists started to pick up some of the bricks that we had thrown and hurled them back at us . So the sky was filled with bricks and other building materials going in all directions. It was pandemonium. At this point a contingent of anti-fascists attacked the back of the march and managed to get one of their banners. The mayhem went on for a bit longer, but the police started to get a wee bit upset, so all the anti-fascists went back to the town centre to regroup.

We hung about the town centre until late afternoon. About 10 of us were in a fish and chip shop when we realised that a group of fascists were coming down the road intent on revenge. Some of our lot immediately started grabbing various iron implements etc that were lying about at some roadworks just outside the chip shop. I'm ashamed to say that myself and a few others just ran away, instead of making a stand. The battle apparently raged outside the chip shop with the anti-fascists eventually winning. Meanwhile one of the members of Red Action and myself ran into another nazi in the market place. I ripped off a bit of wood from a pallet and was swinging it at the nazi skinhead. The Red Action member by my side grabbed a small stepladder from one of the market traders and swung that at the nazi once or twice, then he threw it at the nazi. This was a mistake because the nazi just caught the stepladder and started to chase us with it! Again we ran away. I ran so fast I pulled muscles in both my legs. I was very subdued for the rest of the evening and the trip home because I was so ashamed of my cowardice.

The only light relief came when our three minibuses were heading out of town on the way back to London. The first minibus overtook a skinhead (Nicky Crane I believe) who was walking along the pavement with a couple of skinhead mates. Crane realised the minibus contained anti-fascists and he started shouting abuse and doing cocky "V" signs, blissfully unaware that another minibus was approaching him from behind. Meanwhile a certain person in the second minibus leaned out with an iron bar wrapped in masking tape to make it look like wood. While still doing "V" signs at the first minibus the iron bar hit the skinhead beautifully on the back of the head, like a Tom and Jerry cartoon. His legs went like a rag doll's. We had a perfect view of the whole episode from the third minibus.

7. Stratford, London, 1987(?)

I was passing through Stratford one day on my bike when I spotted a man, about 50 years old, putting stickers up on lamp-posts. I went to check them out and discovered they were National Front stickers. In the meantime the man had gone into a little Italian café across the road. I went in too. He was at the counter getting his order. I went up close and saw the badge on his lapel which said 'England for the English'. I grabbed the badge and his lapel and started ranting

and raving “You fucking fascist” etc. etc. The man completely went to pieces. His tea and apple pie went all over the floor and he just cowered down like a frightened dog. The Italian owner of the café must be well aware of the term fascist, but didn’t want any trouble in his café so I left soon afterwards.

8. Brick Lane, London

This was a long-running sore for the anti-fascist movement. The fascists had been selling their newspapers at the corner of Brick Lane and Bethnal Green Road on-and-off since Mosely's time in the 1930's. Despite being in the middle of the East End Bangladeshi community and opposite a Jewish bakers, the fascists used that place as a focus to fraternise as well as sell their propaganda every Sunday morning. They seemed to receive a warm welcome afterwards in local pubs such as The Blade Bone, The Sun or The Weavers Arms, all under the benevolent gaze of Bethnal Green police force.

AFA and DAM had numerous attempts at knocking them off that pitch. Sometimes it would just be ambushing stragglers, or sometimes we fielded over 50 combatants to take over their pitch, and hold it against all comers. One such battle spilled right across the Bethnal Green Road for several minutes, then the police moved in and arrested more from our side than theirs, surprise, surprise.

Another occasion about six of us from the DAM got tooled up then went down there to sell our newspaper *Direct Action* in order to provoke a reaction. After about ten minutes standing opposite, one of them – Martin Cross – wandered over and asked how much to buy a paper. My comrade said 50p, the proper price. I was standing nearby in a bolshy mood and said “It's a quid for fash”. He looked at me, then quick as a flash headbutted me. I was so surprised I just stood there for a few seconds. Martin Cross turned and walked away. He probably had a good laugh about that later. I didn't. I was so ashamed at being so slow to react. Oh well, we live and learn.

Another time a couple of us had been checking out the fascists one Sunday morning and decided to head off home when who should be walking towards us? Ian Anderson, leader of the NF! A police van full of cops was cruising past at that moment so we whispered not to do anything. But the cop van passed and a few seconds later we were so close to Anderson that I couldn't resist booting him. I kicked him in the bollocks as hard as I could, and my DAM comrade started battering him too as he slumped to the pavement. Then we legged it into a nearby housing estate before the police van could do a U-turn.

(In the 1970's, when the skinhead scene was big, East London suffered a whole catalogue of racist abuse, attacks and even murder – e.g. Altab Ali. Fascist stickers and graffiti were everywhere including slogans daubed all along the outside wall of Bethnal Green Police Station, which they did nothing to remove. In an effort to get the police to do something about the violence community groups held a meeting with Chief Superintendent John Wallis of the Met. He said the only way to stop the National Front selling their papers at Brick Lane was “...to arrive there earlier”. When local Bengali youth groups and others did

exactly that they were arrested for an Action Likely to Cause a Breach of the Peace. See *Brick Lane 1978* by Kenneth Leech.)

Ironically the fascists were only finally knocked off their Brick Lane pitch after the BNP got a councillor, Derek Beackon, elected locally. The election was on a Thursday, and the following Sunday when the fascists were expected to be having a victory parade at Brick Lane a massive punch-up got rid of them. I was not there then, but my comrade said the anti-fascists walked up to them singing *Rule Britannia*, to confuse them. As usual the police thought nothing of wasting tax-payers money by using helicopters to follow certain anti-fascists afterwards. We mobilised for several Sundays afterwards in case the fash tried to come back mob-handed.

9. Trafalgar Square, London

For most of the 1980s an anti-apartheid group held a 24-hour, 7-day protest outside the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square. It was ostensibly a protest at the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela, but it was really a protest against the South African government's racist policies in general. Consequently fascist gangs liked to attack the humble group of protesters whenever possible especially after marches. AFA, therefore, frequently found ourselves in Trafalgar Square looking to attack any fascists.

November was always a focus because for years the NF organised their own march on Remembrance Sunday to the Cenotaph. I don't know how they justified their march to the British War Memorial in Whitehall because fascists supported the German side in World War Two. Needless to say we taunted them with the not very p.c. chants of "Two World Wars and One World Cup" and the theme from "Dads Army". The day would always end, or start with skirmishes in Trafalgar Square or nearby. One year about 60 of us occupied their assembly point at Bressenden Place. About 40 NF came round the corner but they retreated, so we had the moral victory if not a physical one.

On one occasion one of my DAM comrades got separated from us and ended up in the midst of about 200 rampaging fascists. A couple of them were eyeing him up suspiciously, so, embarrassingly he had to join in the chanting "kill the commie scum!", "rights for whites!" etc in an effort to blend in until he could slip away and rejoin us later!

Once a hapless wandering fascist was cornered near Victoria Station, battered a bit, then pinned against a wall while people wrote on his face and clothes 'Nazi', 'fascist', did swastikas etc. using one of those thick black permanent marker pens. Then he was released.

Another year at Trafalgar Square a DAM comrade battered a member of Red Action because he didn't recognise him. He had to apologise afterwards! I believe the Americans call that 'friendly fire'.

One year we spotted a couple of fascists walking across the top end of the Square. A few comrades and myself went after them. I wanted to wait until the fascists were out of the Square then do them in a quiet street away from CCTV and the police. However the comrades I was with were all fired up and jumped on the skinheads just in front of Canada House. I obviously joined in putting the boot in.

After a good bit of that we left the skinheads in a heap and ran off. We went round the back then rejoined the main group of anti-fascists who were gathered on the steps of St.Martin-in-the-Fields church. This was a mistake, I should have gone home, because a cop who had seen the skinheads getting a beating recognised me and managed to corner me later. My predicament was made much worse because the cop pulled out an 18" iron bar that I had hidden in my jacket, even though I hadn't actually used it.

The cop talked to me in the back of the police van in a very sympathetic way, saying things like he thought Nelson Mandela should be released, and the NF were a load of wankers, etc. Naively I agreed with him on these matters instead of staying silent, because as it turned out he used all my replies in court as evidence that I was a dangerous lefty!

I got Community Service every Sunday for about six months, which to be honest was not unpleasant at all. However after I had been there a few months who should arrive in our Community Service team but Martin Cross – famous nazi thug, lead singer of Skrewdriver, and the person who had head-butted me at Brick Lane a few years before. (He is currently serving life for stabbing to death a fellow fascist in one of their internal disputes, tee hee). So I said to our supervisor that I was here first so Martin Cross would have to go elsewhere or there would be some argy-bargy. Fortunately, they moved him before the next Sunday, as I did not relish the prospect of some aggravation when I was already walking on thin ice.

Incidentally, a member of Red Action told me that on his first day doing Community Service in North London one of the lads burnt down the shed which contained all the tools! Consequently they had a nice relaxing time for several weeks afterwards.

10. Berwick Street, London, 1989

The fascists had a sympathiser who opened a little shop in Riding House Street selling neo-nazi badges, magazines, clothing, etc. During an anti-fascist demonstration outside one Saturday morning a Scottish comrade and myself saw one of their 'customers' skulking away. We let him get about 100 yards down Berwick Street then ambushed him. This was one of several occasions where I saw my comrade do his wonderful technique for getting fascists on the floor. It was a sort of full speed flying leap where his whole body lands sideways on the fascists head/shoulders and knocks them for six. This is followed by a flurry of fists and boots leaving the fascist in a very sorry state.

11. Marble Arch, London, 1989

In 1989 Blood and Honour arranged another large neo-nazi music gig in London. They didn't dare publicise the actual venue partly because it would be targeted by anti-fascists and partly because they normally booked venues using pseudonyms to avoid the management cancelling the gig. So they publicised a meeting-point for their followers to be re-directed from. In this case it was Marble Arch tube station.

The date coincided with the 3-day DAM National Conference in Wiltshire, but a minibus load of us came back to London for the day. It was another one of those occasions when most of us were convinced we were going to be massacred! Everyone knew that Blood and Honour could muster several hundred or even a thousand bodies. If it was left to me I would probably have suggested that we all go home and have a nice cup of tea. But fortunately the 'movers and shakers' within AFA are more daring than me! After we met Red Action and various other anti-fascists we headed down to Marble Arch about 100 strong, and considerably more confident. And what a success it turned out to be!

All afternoon fascists arrived in the area. Sometimes on their own, in groups and even a coachload. And each time they got kicked to shit! It was brilliant. My favourite incident was when three of us 'regulars' and a fellow who at the time dressed as a hippy followed a nazi into a back street and battered him until he was begging. Afterwards the hippy-looking fellow confided to me that he was going to have a haircut and start wearing proper shoes instead of sandals because he really enjoyed this anti-fascist stuff!

A DAM comrade got arrested that day for chucking a rubbish bin through a fascist coach window, but luckily got the case dropped because the police are so incompetent. Phew. But while he was in the cells I phoned his Dad to say he had been arrested, and he gave me a right bollocking ie "He always gets in trouble when he goes out with you lot, etc. etc." There's gratitude for you!

Another DAM comrade was also arrested that day. He has as much contempt for the British judicial system as for the fascists, so he showed up in court wearing shorts and a sleeveless t-shirt which only said “Millwall Away – Nuff Said”. Luckily he got off with a fine, which the DAM paid.

12. Davenent Centre, London, 1990

AFA organised a public meeting in the heart of the East End, what the fascists like to think of as their manor, to ‘throw down the gauntlet’ to them. My job was to scout the area by motorbike looking for any sign of them. About 50 anti-fascists were massed inside the Davenent Centre (plus members of the public attending the meeting) waiting for them. As I was riding round I did see a group of about 5 lads nearby but didn’t think they were fascists so I didn’t bother telling my comrades back in the Centre. However, soon afterwards a small homemade bomb (made from a collection of fireworks probably) was thrown over the back wall of the Davenent Centre. Fortunately nobody was injured or panicked. AFA stewards gave chase to some lads but didn’t catch them. In hindsight I realise that the lads I saw may have been the ones who threw in the bomb, and I should have reported them to my comrades who could have checked them out properly.

13. Norwich, 1990(?)

This was one of the few events where it was just the DAM doing the business – I think Red Action were at a conference or something that weekend. The BNP were having an election meeting in a primary school in Norwich as they delight in doing in accordance with the Representation of the People Act.

About 10 of us from the DAM hired a minibus from London plus we met a few local DAM members there. When we arrived at the school we found a smallish demonstration of lefties (SWP etc) huddling behind the police lines. It was all a bit pathetic as they chanted in posh voices “Police protect the fascists!”

We decided to hang about further down the road where we found the car of John Tyndall, the leader of the BNP. The tyres were promptly slashed. A while later we spotted Tyndall and his minder come out of the school, walk down the road and start to get into his car. We raced down the road towards them, across lawns and picking up rocks from gardens and arrived just as they were frantically trying to drive off. The windscreen was smashed with one rock, and another rock smashed through the drivers window and hit the minder on the side of his head. 180! The little car screeched off pursued by a hail of stones. The polite lefties at the school gates were gobsmacked to see Tyndall roar past in a car that looked like it had just been in the Destruction Derby! A few more bottles were thrown for good measure.

14. London Bridge, 1990

London Bridge is the main train station going to Welling where the British National Party have their office/ bookshop/ headquarters at Upper Wickham Lane. About 50 of us were on our way there to join a big lefty march when we spotted Tony Lecomber and his wife coming into the station – obviously also on his way to Welling. Tony Lecomber is one of the top dogs in the BNP with a list of convictions for violence and even bomb-making. Anyway we were so surprised to see him stroll up to the ticket window that none of us moved at first. So I walked up to him and with a bit of nifty foot-work sent him sprawling. Then a few of us put the boot in until his wife, who was screaming her head off, took out a CS gas aerosol from her bag and started spraying us all. I did manage to grab the parcel Lecomber was carrying which turned out to be a load of BNP t-shirts. (Lecomber fancied himself, so naturally became a target for AFA's attentions. He consequently spent so much time on the floor that his nickname became Tarmac Tony!)

I swapped jackets with a comrade because these train stations have loads of CCTV cameras. I stayed out of the station for about 20 minutes in case the cops came. Then I rejoined our group, which breaks one of the survival rules of anti-fascism, namely, only do one thing then go home (See Appendix 4). But I got away with it on that occasion.

15. Waterloo, London, 1992

This was probably the biggest anti-fascist battle since Lewisham (1977). It was even covered on national TV news, radio, tabloids etc. It was to oppose a 'Blood and Honour' concert. Blood and Honour was a fascist music organisation that promoted racist bands such as Skrewdriver and No Remorse (previously called Dead Paki in the Gutter). They could attract crowds of 500-2000 mostly skinheads.

In fact anti-fascism would be much easier if all the fascists wore the skinhead 'uniform' because (a) we can spot them more easily than the 'casuals', and (b) the skinhead scene, being a branch of fashion, is guaranteed to remain a small phenomenon.

Blood and Honour had advertised that they were holding a massive gig with all their top names at an undisclosed venue. They advised their followers (not trusting them with the information, and to avoid anti-fascists) to go first to Waterloo station to be re-directed. This was a common fascist tactic.

That morning about a hundred of us anti-fascists met at The Old Bell in Kilburn. We took the tube to Waterloo and emerged up the escalators to the concourse. I don't know about anyone else but I was very nervous. I thought we were going to be slaughtered. Everyone knew that Blood and Honour could muster ten times more people than we had.

The station concourse was nearly deserted. We discovered afterwards that British Rail had given Black and Asian workers the day off – pandering to racism. A small group of Red Action went into the station buffet and found a couple of skinheads who had been enjoying a quiet cup of tea. There was some loud rumbling and smashing sounds, then the Reds emerged unscathed and blended with our crowd. Five minutes later an ambulance arrived to cart off the two hapless fascists. (Rumour has it that they might have been, in fact, plain clothes coppers).

We spent the rest of the afternoon ambushing groups of fascists as they arrived, and trying to avoid the police. For example, four fascists arrived by car and were set upon until every window was broken, and the rest of the car was not exactly in showroom condition. The battles raged in all the surrounding streets. A comrade from Norwich and myself piled into a group of three fascists by the Waterloo roundabout. One of them turned to attack my comrade and I stuck my foot out to trip him up and with wonderful luck it was perfectly timed and he keeled over and hit his head, crack, on the pavement. He was unconscious I think, but in the heat of the moment I went and booted him in the head as hard as I could anyway. In fact I was a bit worried afterwards in case I'd killed him. I kept checking the TV news for a few days. The two other

fascists were still there and I suppose we could have steamed into them some more, but we ran back to the main group.

Cheeky persons have summarised the anti-fascist events at Waterloo by saying “we closed more stations than the IRA”!

16. Welling, Kent 1993

In about 1993 there was a massive lefty march, more than 10,000 strong, against the BNP office/ bookshop in Welling. Conveniently for the fascists hundreds and hundreds of tooled-up police were on hand to protect their bookshop. An Auschwitz survivor led the march and requested that the police let us through, but they refused. A massive riot ensued, which didn't achieve anything but its always a good laugh when everyone is chucking paving stones and other stuff at the cops. However, media photographers subsequently passed their photos onto the police which resulted in several dawn raids and arrests. Apparently Red Action found the BNP hiding in a pub a few miles away that day, and had a ‘free and fair exchange of views with them’!

17. Dagenham, 1993(?)

One day I noticed that “Paki's Out” had just been painted in giant letters along the side of Dagenham Swimming Pool. I decided to go and paint it out that evening. About midnight I was happily painting over it when I noticed a man with an Alsatian and a woman out of the corner of my eye. Better safe than sorry, I thought, so I decided to walk round the block and finish the painting afterwards. I turned into Morris Road, then THUD!, I received a massive punch on the back of the head which sent me sprawling forwards onto the pavement. I jumped up and got into a furious fight with the man who had seen me painting. We were knocking each other all over the place; through privet hedges, onto car bonnets, into the road. We were quite evenly matched I suppose, although he had the element of surprise initially. After what seemed like an age, although probably just a few minutes, we both reached complete exhaustion and stalemate. We looked at each other, then staggered off in different directions. Personally, I was totally shattered mentally and physically and I presume he was too.

18. Near misses

It seems that three out of four anti-fascist call-outs don't result in any action. Either the fascists are too protected by the police, we can't find them despite our best efforts, they don't show up when we expect them, or we've been so outnumbered its too risky to attack. Also, to be truthful, we sometimes didn't engage against them because our organisation was not perfect or we spent too

long in the pub and missed chances. We are only human. Below are listed some of the 'near misses'.

Brighton DAM stewarded an AFA public meeting expecting the fascists to arrive. But they are never there when you want them!

Grays Face-off with the NF in the town centre.

Liverpool Chasing around the city centre. Never caught up with the fascists but got involved in a fracas with the cops which resulted in one of the police inspectors hats being set ablaze in the middle of the road. All good clean fun.

Manchester Half-a-dozen trips there for the 'Manchester Martyrs' march which the fascists always opposed – and they sometimes got a kicking from local Irish Republicans.

Blackburn We arrived 5 hours late due to roadworks on the M6.

Chesterfield All day spent trying to track down the NF and their friends the Ulster Loyalists. At one stage we got in hot pursuit of two lads in red uniforms who we thought were from the loyalist marching band – it turned out they worked at the local B+Q!

Sheffield A couple of trips there when the NF started doing paper sales in the town centre.

Some of the local lefties mistook us for plain-clothes police because we look 'normal'. I'll never forget one of the local comrades, who was wearing some massive motorcycle gloves (on a hot sunny day), delivering a beautiful knockout blow to one fascist.

Newham/Tower Hamlets Loads of times we've been out trying to track down the fascists in these areas because they normally target here for their election campaigns

Plaistow DAM tried to oppose the NF's Albert Mariner memorial event.

Hounslow The NF have tried to recruit in this area and hold a few meetings. We went along to cause trouble, and Red Action managed to batter some of them in McDonalds.

Holloway Road and Edgware Road Irish Republican marches regularly harangued by fascists from the safety of a police cordon. Sometimes skirmishes occurred.

Barking DAM comrades including myself got tooled up to batter the NF paper sale one Saturday morning, but it was lashing down with rain so they didn't show up. Part-timers!

Old Street Stand off between AFA and the NF.

West Ham The BNP had a team re-directing their members from West Ham tube station to a meeting at the Tidal Basin Tavern. There was a large anti-fascist demonstration opposite, with the police dividing the two sides. The police used vans from the Racial Incident Unit (a unit supposedly set up to help *victims* of racial attacks) to transport the BNP to their meeting in the pub (ie help them cause *more* racial attacks).

19. Events where I wasn't present

The history of anti-fascism in Britain has countless other significant, and sometimes comical, episodes. Here are a few I've heard about.

During a large AFA meeting at Conway Hall the fascists sent in a scout. He was spotted by AFA stewards who escorted him to a quiet room for questioning. On the way to the room, expecting an imminent beating, he completely lost control of his mental faculties and his anal sphincter. He was babbling and blubbing like a hopeless psychiatric case, and the stink from the shit which filled his trousers kept the AFA stewards at arms length until he was ejected from Conway Hall. That fascist was sometimes referred to afterwards as 'our first prisoner of war!'

When John Tyndall, BNP leader, stood as a candidate in a Dagenham by-election in about 1995 the fascists tried to do numerous leafleting sessions in the local area. AFA mobilised 50-100 people several times to give them a hard time. On one occasion an AFA scout stood next to some BNP members who were giving an interview to some journalists. The BNPer was saying in his most shocked and self-pitying voice "yes... the BNP get blamed for all the violence, but it is us who always end up in hospital!" It's just not cricket.

In 1988 (I think) the fascists tried to celebrate the anniversary of William of Orange landing in Devon. Something to do with the protestants triumph over those pesky papists. The fascists intended to have a march around the town (Exeter) and the anti-fascists intended to cause havoc as usual, thereby getting the march cancelled. What the fascists had not realised though was that the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall was a bit of a liberal (in relative terms!). He was not like the other Chief Constables around Britain who go out

of their way to help the fascists. In other words the NF and the BNP normally have masses of police protection, and sympathy and apparently, cross-membership. Anyway, on this occasion the NF arrived by train in Exeter and there was only one copper standing there, plus some anti-fascists nearby. The leading fascist went up to the copper and said cockily “We are the National Front and we are having a march here today. Where are the rest of the police?” To the fascists’ despair, the copper replied “that’s OK, you carry on with your march”. At the thought of no police protection the fascists promptly got back on the train and fucked off. This incident is another example of the truth of Albert Meltzer’s maxim that there is no such thing as a fascist march, only a police march.

A DAM comrade told me about a fracas in Islington High Street he was involved in, in about 1985. Red Action and some DAM members were having a few beers one Saturday night when someone rushed into the pub to say that 20 or so fascists were outside a nearby pub giving grief to two lads wearing Celtic shirts. The anti-fascists drank up and marched round there double quick. On arriving, half the fascists tried to flee into the pub but to their dismay the landlord had locked the doors. A massive scrap ensued with pint glasses, fists and boots flying everywhere. After a few minutes loads of police vehicles screeched up, so everyone dispersed.

A well-known member of Red Action was walking away down a quiet road when a car with two blokes in it pulled alongside and one of the occupants shouted “that’s him!”. The anti-fascist ran but the car chased him until he was knackered then the two men jumped out and gave him the biggest kicking imaginable. I saw him the next day and his face was a mess. Obviously he thought that all this was the work of the fascists, but somehow it was discovered that they were plain-clothes police (I think witnesses took the car registration and identified them later). I think the incident did result in an official police apology, and the comrade got a compensation payment.

Another comrade, who was arrested, overheard one of the fascists, a soldier, in the police station giving a pitiful account of the incident. He whinged on like a big baby “...it was them who started it... it’s not fair... etc.etc”. The Master Race my arse.

In the National Front’s heyday from the early ‘70s until 1979 one of the anti-fascist movements bravest souls burrowed away as an infiltrator. This anarchist comrade did such a convincing job that he became the head of security protecting the leadership. To reach this position NF members have to fight each other to see who is the toughest. Well, our anti-fascist hero was quite handy in this department (I think he had had unarmed combat training previously) so it was quite a pleasure to batter various arrogant fascists, a bit like killing two birds

with one stone. On the occasions when the NF leadership actually needed some protection (ie when they were being attacked by anti-fascists) our hero would take a dive and feign injury.

Our comrades career as an infiltrator came to an end one day when he drugged all the leadership and was preparing to steal all the National Fronts documents and money from their safe. Unfortunately one of the fascists woke up early and called the police. The police arrested the anti-fascist comrade on charges of administering a noxious substance and he had to do several years in prison.

Incidentally, during this period our comrade would privately advocate to anti-fascists that they should open a branch of the National Front because each new branch was given £250 as a start-up grant. This policy would have gradually bankrupted and demoralised the NF, but I don't know if anybody did it.

Following the racist murder of Rolan Adams in Thamesmead there was a large protest march in about 1991. At the march Red Action passed the word around that there would be the opportunity for 'further activities' later that evening in London. *Searchlight* had printed some replica tickets to a League of St. George meeting and given them to the Reds. Half the membership of the League of St. George were old racist British Empire codgers, and half were boot-and-braces skinheads. A match made in heaven!

Assorted people from the Rolan Adams march tagged along, instead of it being an invitation-only thing. The Reds kept the location secret until everyone arrived at Kensington Town Hall. There were a few skinheads guarding the door and there was a bit of argy-bargy until Gerry Gable stepped in and said the skinheads were in fact working under cover for *Searchlight*.

So the anti-fascists piled into the meeting. Only half-a-dozen old duffers were there and they were told to sit down and shut up while Gable gave them a lecture on fascism. Other League of St. George members arrived in dribs and drabs and were thrown down the stairs or given a slap depending on how much resistance they put up. Some went and listened meekly to Gable but some made quite a rumpus. One noisy bastard who wouldn't keep quiet had to be locked in a cupboard, alone to lick his wounds.

By this time, with blood dripping down the stairs, some of the more delicate anti-fascists, in particular some students from Leeds, started to get panicky. They didn't realise that anti-fascism involves fighting fire with fire, and they wanted to leave. This would have compromised everything so a certain person told them to sit down and shut the fuck up. But eventually the students were getting really jumpy and it was decided that all our side had to leave together.

Upon leaving the Town Hall police cars started screeching up. Everyone dispersed, some by taxi. Gable and one of the leading lights in the Reds were arrested.

In about 1992 *Madness* were playing a gig in Finsbury Park, North London. Although they are a kosher band they had one member who was ex-NF, so fascists liked to go to their gigs for a little dance. Or maybe the fascists do have some good taste in music despite being silly as arseholes in every other department. Either way, AFA mobilised because the fash were expected to be there.

Red Action, DAM and a few others were holed up in a pub called the Enkell Arms. Some DAM members went scouting and found the fascists in another pub nearby. They nipped back to the Enkell Arms to 'gather the troops'. Unfortunately there was a lot of dithering by certain people, and before you could say "Freedom For Tooting" the fascists had found the Enkell Arms.

In no time bricks were flying through the windows. Uncharacteristically most of Red Action ran into the back room leaving the anarchists to defend the place using pool cues, furniture and those heavy pub ashtrays. In fact our heroes probably smashed more of the pub windows with those ashtrays than the fascists did! There was one hilarious moment as a certain DAM comrade fulfilled a lifetime ambition and used the bar as a springboard just like in those Wild West movies. The cops were there pretty quick, just as the anarchists were getting into their stride, but nobody was arrested fortunately.

In the early '90s the BNP candidate Derek Beackon was standing for the post of councillor in Tower Hamlets. AFA comrades had noticed that he walked across his local park every Sunday morning, on his way to the BNP paper-sale at Brick Lane. So 3-4 comrades dressed up in tracksuits one Sunday and pretended to be warming-up/training in the park. Unfortunately Beackon was later than usual that morning so the comrades felt really foolish jogging about for an hour or so. Eventually Beackon came into the park and the AFA comrades came up behind him, masked up, carrying iron bars. As he turned round he screamed like a pig as the first blows started to fall. However, two men passing by (one black, one white) thought Beackon was the victim in a mugging attempt and steamed in to help him (the irony of it!). Beackon ran away with one shoe and was saved the humiliation of standing at the hustings in bandages and plaster. At the election the following week he was victorious by 7 votes after three re-counts. There were rumours and circumstantial evidence that vote-rigging had occurred (eg vote early and vote often).

On the subject, what must the fascists think as their wounds are being tended to in hospital by different coloured nurses, or horror of horrors, Jewish medical staff!

Occasionally AFA would come across the BNP transport parked up – usually a transit van. Every conceivable thing was done to those vans, externally and under the bonnet. Once a load of recordings of Hitler’s speeches were found in the back. Needless to say, they went straight into a nearby canal.

A life-long anarchist and anti-fascist called Jim (now deceased) from Bolton told me a story from the ‘70s. The NF were due to have a march through the town the following Saturday and there was considerable excitement about this. Jim’s teenage son, fancying a bit of action, gingerly said to his Dad that he was thinking of joining the NF march. Jim thought for a moment then said “have you asked your grandmother about this?”. Jim’s son was puzzled, and asked “what has it got to do with her?” Jim replied “...because you’ll be living round there from now on!” The son never did go on the march.

20. Conclusion

As I said at the beginning, my anti-fascist activities are not of epic proportions. But if you consider 100 or 200 people doing a similar amount, plus a handful of real heroes who have each battered dozens or hundreds of fascists, then you can see why the far-right dare not have a street presence in Britain at this time. We should be proud of that.

On a note of caution though, the fascists now try to inveigle their politics into community issues. For example they try to get local councillors elected to tackle issues such as housing for ‘white’ people. They have been quite successful at this, and this may be the precursor to them getting the confidence to get the boneheads out on the streets again. (In 2000 the NF have started having marches again in Kent and the East Midlands – *Ed.*)

Red Action and others have monitored this shift in the fascists tactics, and formed a counter-strategy. It is not as glamorous as the street-fighting activities, but seeing as I am not doing anything better I won’t criticise it here.

The reason this booklet is called *Bash The Fash* (1) is because hopefully other activists will be encouraged to put pen to paper and record their own experiences in *Bash The Fash* (2), *Bash The Fash* (3), or its equivalent. With luck we’ll get more sequels than *Rocky*.

Appendix 1: Searchlight

Gerry Gable, editor of *Searchlight*, now openly admits to working hand-in-glove with the police and MI5. There are three main reasons why co-operating with

the police against the fascists is a bad idea (i) the police demand or covertly obtain information about our side who they regard as a worse enemy anyway (ii) the police agenda is against 'extremists' left and right, which may account for *Searchlight's* disgraceful smear campaign against some fine anti-fascists in the DAM and Class War (iii) as some hairy bloke once said "the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class alone" ie we can fight our own battles thank you very much.

Appendix 2: Tottenham

On the first day of the JJ Foods strike the Turkish boss drafted in members of the Turkish fascist organisation, the Grey Wolves, to attack the strikers. The fascists used sticks, bricks, bottles, crowbars and billiard balls in bags. Twenty minutes later the police arrived to attack the remaining strikers who were still standing. See *Up Against The Odds* by John McArthur, available from AK Press.

Appendix 3: Joe Pearce

The case of Joe Pearce is an example of how the Race Relations Act can have the reverse of its intended effect. Pearce was imprisoned for Inciting Racial Hatred by publishing a magazine called *Bulldog*. He instantly became a *cause celebre* for the National Front. Loads of graffiti went up everywhere saying "Free Joe Pearce". We spent many evenings going round painting that out, or the more creative anti-fascists would simply add "...with every packet of nazipops"! Nevertheless, the NF at last had their own martyr and that gave them a real boost. A better solution than imprisonment would have been if he had just suffered a terrible accident.

Appendix 4: Survival rules

A few suggestions about survival rules.

- (i) Never leave anyone behind.
- (ii) Never talk to the police. If arrested don't make a statement. You can almost guarantee they will say "your friends have told us x,y,z so you might as well admit your part". Say nothing. When the heat is off, next day hopefully when nobody has said anything, things won't look so bad.
- (iii) It is better to do one serious thing then get right away from the area and live to fight another day.
- (iv) Empty your pockets in the morning. If arrested while carrying a bit of dope, a small penknife or an address book your life can get much more complicated. Carry enough cash to get taxis in an emergency.
- (v) Keep yourself fit, and sober.
- (vi) Four people who know what they are doing can be much more effective than four hundred useless paper-sellers. So, try to find a small group of people

you can trust not to run away or blab when things get heavy, and stick with them.

(vii) Try to prepare in advance – tactics, local geography, emergency phone numbers, etc. As Joe Thomas used to say “...the best spontaneous revolutionary actions are always in fact well planned beforehand”!

Appendix 5: Text of AFA leaflet, 1999

Anti-fascist Action was formed in 1985. The founding statement committed AFA to provide a “physical and ideological opposition” to the far-right. Since then, AFA has faithfully fulfilled this role, playing a pivotal part in the fight against fascism.

An immediate focus for the new organisation was the annual NF Remembrance Day parade. The NF at the time were the main fascist party and Remembrance Day was the highlight in the fascist calendar. An estimated 2,000 fascists took part in 1986 and in successive years AFA led similar numbers of anti-fascists into the area. This focus led the BNP to withdraw entirely from the event, complaining that the area was ‘full of reds’. And by 1990 the NF itself had been whittled down to 200.

Meanwhile in between times, smaller NF marches elsewhere were often completely disrupted by AFA. Notable successes in this period included Stockport and Bury St. Edmunds both in 1986. The fall-out from the latter leading directly to a split in the NF, with one faction abandoning the ‘march and grow’ tactic entirely (a scenario destined to be repeated by the BNP almost a decade later).

1989 saw the music based Blood and Honour movement establish itself in Carnaby Street in the heart of Central London with, significantly, a number of outlets openly trading in far-right merchandise. As well as ‘removing’ the fascists from the pubs locally, a concerted six month campaign saw the B&H shops forcibly shut down, and the far-right influence in the area extinguished.

In an attempt to turn the tide, B&H announced that a major international gig with a thousand tickets sold in advance was to be held in London. On 27th May 1989 AFA occupied their re-direction point at Marble Arch, preventing 500 fascists, many who had travelled from Europe, from attending the event.

It would be September 1992 before B&H, by now huge on the continent, would be tempted to try again. An initiative resulted in what the media dubbed the ‘Battle of Waterloo’. The battle which lasted over three hours, forced Charing Cross, Waterloo and a host of smaller tube stations in the area to close ‘due to riots’.

By 1990 the BNP, now the largest far-right party, launched the ‘Rights for Whites’ campaign in East London. AFA rose to the challenge, by ambushing two election meetings in quick succession, and for the first time since the 1970s took over the BNP/ NF Brick Lane paper sale. This was followed by an intensive campaign of work in the area. 60,000 leaflets were distributed door to door. AFA speakers addressed meetings in schools and with community groups. BNP pubs were targeted. While a 10,000 strong Unity Carnival in the summer of 1991 put anti-fascism back on the national agenda. In November 1991 a 4,000 strong AFA

demonstration against race attacks marched through the BNP heartland of Bethnal Green unopposed. An event that led directly to the relaunch of the ANL.

By now, BNP activities were being confronted by AFA the length and breadth of the country. In Scotland where, prior to 1990, the BNP had been allowed a free run, the AFA launch saw the tables turned figuratively and literally. On one notable occasion, BNP leader John Tyndall was forced to escape an AFA siege through a sewer. This was swiftly followed by a series of devastating setbacks for the BNP both in Manchester and the satellite towns surrounding it. A method of operation soon taken up by the AFA Midlands region. By 1994 the BNP were now losing 'the battle for control of the streets' not just in London but nationally. A fact they publicly acknowledged in April that year when announcing that there would be "no more marches, meetings, punch-ups". It was a decisive moment.

For a brief period C18 picked up the physical force gauntlet. Heavily hyped by *Searchlight* (magazine) and subsequently the media, the "charismatic street fighter" myth was quickly exposed by AFA stewards. All the major initiatives which came under their protection were confronted with relish. At the B&H gig in London in January 1994, and UVF marches in both Bolton and London in 1996, security was breached and C18 humiliated. A retaliatory bombing campaign of which London AFA was a target exposed its State links (MI5), and C18 effectively collapsed.

Fully aware of the differing fortunes of anti-fascism on the continent AFA hosted an International Conference for militant anti-fascists in October 1997. Despite being banned by the Labour run Camden Council at the last minute (a decision which resulted in a four-figure out of court settlement), the conference which attracted 22 groups from the USA, Canada and Europe was a huge success. The Militant Anti-Fascist Network which resulted is already proving influential, with a particular resonance in Germany, where the far-right have just recently entered regional government.

As well as countering far-right initiatives, AFA has been pro-active on behalf of anti-fascism in other areas. In 1991 it launched its own magazine *Fighting Talk*. Through music based organisations like Cable Street Beat and Freedom of Movement and its influence with fanzines at leading football clubs it has, by pre-empting the fascists, helped re-awaken the tradition of anti-fascist working class resistance at a cultural level.

Since 1985 AFA has diligently and successfully repulsed a whole series of initiatives by the far-right. Demonstrating in that process not only how, but as importantly why, fascism must be ruthlessly confronted at the earliest possible

stage. An obvious result being that despite having one of the highest race attack rates in Europe (a figure that has quadrupled in a decade) the British far-right, unlike their political counterparts in mainland Europe (the far-right recently topping the poll in Austria) have thus far been firmly confined to the margins. That said, it is a situation the BNP, by standing in all regions and distributing over 10 million recruitment leaflets for the European elections in June, are clearly determined to change. As they openly admit if AFA can be outflanked: 'if AFA can be stopped, that is all we need to win'.

In recognition of this danger, militant anti-fascism, rather than resting on its laurels, has been busily preparing for the challenge. It is a new phase of the struggle. Which if won in Britain, can trigger a similar resistance in Europe.

An historic struggle.

A struggle moreover you personally can help win.

Join AFA. Ring the National Office. 07000 569 569

or write to AFA, BM 1734, London, WC1N 3XX.

Further reading

Heroes or Villains published by AFA

The 43 Group by Morris Beckman

Durruti: The People Armed by Abel Paz (Black Rose books)

Germany Calling: A short history of British fascism by Ross Bradshaw