

Interview from UK Resist 5 (Summer 1991)
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Present: Matty, Steve, Christie, Jason and Paul (Matt and Brendon otherwise engaged). Harangued by Ben Stargazer and Jake Lagando one Sunday night round Matty's flat in North London. Photos by Sheena.

UK R: *So how did the band come together?*

STEVE: I wanted to get a band together years & years ago. I put adverts in the music press and eventually found Jez the Jester our old drummer. I knew Matt Vinyl through political activity and going to gigs and that's how we met everyone else really.

UK R: *What was the idea at the time? Was it music or politics that motivated you?*

MATTY: Football!

STEVE: I always wanted to be in a band that would go in a political direction & have something to say. But I guess music was the real reason I wanted to get a band together, though I wanted there to be a message, I wanted some point to it.

MATTY: All the early songs were very politically orientated, and over the years we've become more intense politically But we haven't become a "rant-about-anything" band--we sing about proper topics.

STEVE: We're trying to move away from sloganeering. I mean we've got songs like "Victory to the ANC", but we're trying to move away from such blatant sloganeering & write more subtle lyrics, like "10 Years On" about the hunger strikers. It's not a sloganeering song but it's got a message there.

UK R: *What was the original musical inspiration for the band You had a bit of an image as an Oi band.*

STEVE: I can't stand Oi.

MATTY: What it was, I was in an Oi band before called Complete Control and when we started out we milked a few of their songs. And Bilko our ex-vocalist was into Oi and at the time we were into doing Oi stuff. And also because of my old band we had contacts with Oi Records which was the only label interested in us at the time. I think Bilko had alot to do with the Oi thing & when he left it sort of fell through and we stopped doing the Oi stuff almost immediately.

STEVE: People still put us across as an Oi band, especially on the continent. We played Frankfurt in December & it was actually billed as an Oi festival, though apart from Comrade there weren't any Oi bands playing. It was a SHARP thing, but it was billed as an Oi festival.

MATTY: The guy who organised it said he hadn't seen us since the last time we played there which was also an Oi festival when we still had Bilko in the band. We were totally different to what he expected and he said he wished he billed it as a punk thing so all the punks would've come down as well. Although we're not really a punk band either--we're just our own thing.

PAUL: I'd say we were a punk band.

UK R: *What about your other trips abroad?*

STEVE: We've been to Belgium & Germany a few times. The last one was the most important. It was a benefit tour for Anti Fascist Action Defence Fund & The Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign. It was a split tour with The Dick Ugly Ensemble. I don't know how much money it raised but the important thing was we went out there putting across the message and we met a lot of good people. We were playing to all sorts of people punks, skins, mods.

UK R: *Blaggers ITA have not been afraid to take an overt stance against fascism, even though this has made them obvious targets for fascist groups.*

PAUL: Every one of our gigs in Germany was threatened. We turned up at the first couple of gigs and were told that fascists had threatened to attack them, so we kept our eyes open & stayed on the lookout. But by the end we just took it as a joke.

JASON: That's all the fascists do--threaten us. Ian Stewart did an interview with some German fanzine & said The Blaggers can never play in England & never advertise their gigs cos when they do Blood & Honour just smash them up. That's such bollocks it's funny.

UK R: *There were rumours circulating that you got chased down the motorway after a gig in Leeds and someone fired a shotgun at you.*

MATTY: I think that's something to do with us having an armoured van and we put out that story to promote ourselves. We got this ex securicor van off Mensi from the Upstarts--a bullet proof armoured van like the RUC use. So we put out a story to the music press that we got attacked with a shotgun but our van saved us.

STEVE: One fascist did turn up the other night at a gig. We were playing in Wisbeach with Oi Polloi--it was a real small town and these boneheads arrived. One had a fascist badge and the other a Union Jack T-shirt. We thought things might get a bit dodgy as we had an Anti Fascist Action banner up behind the stage. We had a word with the organiser & he said the skins were okay apart from one of them. So we sent our spy, Mr V to investigate and he came back saying he was a real dodgy bonehead, moaning about the AFA banner & the Class War stall at the gig. So we decided to get up on stage & keep making strong anti-fascist statements.

MATTY: We were hoping he would try something, so we could hit him. But he didn't do anything, he just fucked off after the first few statements.

STEVE: But also loads of people were supporting us. Even the skins were getting up on stage shouting, "Smash Fascism." They all bought copies of Red Action afterwards!

UK R: *Things did get a bit more dodgy at a previous gig in Telford, ending up with all the members of the band being arrested and locked up for the weekend.*

STEVE: We played a gig in Telford and it got attacked by fascists. It was the only gig that has actually been attacked. They lost and we all got nicked.

MATTY: They were just locals who came along to see what we were like & they didn't like what we were talking about & decided to try to give us a bit of a hard

time. But they didn't realise the people involved with the Blaggers were going to fight back.

STEVE: We all got arrested and it's all over now but it dragged on for a long while. It got really messy cos we were all very stupid & naive & we all made statements to the police. It was the first time I'd been arrested and the same with alot of people in the band. I think it's worth saying to people if they don't already know, if your ever arrested don't say mything to the Old Bill. If that had happened we'd have been alright.

MATTY: It dragged on for a year before they dropped the charges. It would've gone on for a week if we hadn't made the statements.

UK R: *Blaggers ITA have been going through a spell of playing gigs in London on a weekly and almost daily basis. Are they finding this a successful way to take the band forward or are they playing to the same 20 or 30 people each time.*

JASON: It's basically just good pratice. It gives a chance to get together. We haven't got some big management company paying people hundreds of pounds to promote us & put us on the front page of the music press. So we can only keep on playing small gigs unless someone offers us a really good gig.

MATTY: Since we got back from Germany we haven't been rehearsing. We just do any gig people ask us to do at the moment. But look at Snuff that's the way they went forward. We just want to play gigs basically & if people don't turn up it's a bit depressing but it doesn't mean we'll stop playing gigs cos that's what were all about.

UK R: *Don't you get frustrated that you aren't getting more attention after 4 years of hard slog?*

EVERYONE: Yeah!

JASON: When you think about it, the type of music we were playing has gone down alot in popularity. It might surface again.

MATTY: In a way I think we were a bit stuck. I mean were trying to push off this Oi image--we don't want it. And anyway the reality is that most skinheads are fascists or well dodgy anyway. Even alot of those involved in Ska in Britain would fuck off the SHARP thing, especially in London. We're not saying all skins are like that but alot of them are. And then all the punks say we're an Oi band & they're not into us because of that, or alot of punks seem to have the image of us as Stalinist over the top Communist hate-merchants. I think maybe what we did early on was ram politics down peoples throats to much.

PAUL: Things have changed--there seems alot more apathy around. Like the biggest complaint you hear now is from people who have a go at political bands cos it's all been said before and think it's all the same old shit if you sing about politics. But you open up their lyric sheets & it's all these bloody personal lyrics that are all the same as well.

MATTY: Fair enough you can be subtle. I mean I have conflicting views over what style of lyrics to write. You either write lyrics that are up-front like "Victory to the ANC" which aren't well written lyrics or anything but straight down to nitty

gritty of what you want to say. Or you could write songs like "Naples" & write them about anything and explain later what they're about and only people who are really close to the band would know what they're about. Sometimes that can be okay I guess.

JASON: You have to remember there are always going to be kids coming along who maybe haven't heard much politics and maybe we can interest & influence them to some degree. The older ones have probably heard it all before.

UK R: *A couple of your new songs are incorporating new musical styles. Does this signal a change of direction and an attempt to reach a wider audience?*

MATTY: Basically we enjoy doing something new. We decided to write a song a bit like the farm or something to see if we could actually do it. It was totally new to us all. Jason hadn't really done that type of drum beat before & Paul hadn't done that type of guitar. The vocals weren't jus shouting & screaming--I had to try & sing. We did it and it came out pretty good also the trumpet fitted in pretty good. So we decided to write a couple more like that.

JASON: The dance/rave stuff has had a bit of an influence on us, cos it's got so much punch to it. It's like when punk first mixed metal with their music it gave them an extra edge. Also more people will come along if they can dance to it. I mean you get hundreds of people going to an indie disco but only 30 or 40 going to a punk gig.

MATTY: But we're keeping the other stuff as well like we've written this song "10 Years On" which is probably the best punk song we've ever done with any line up.

CHRISTIE: You get something different from every member of the band. Some are into punk, I was a House DJ. Everybody brings something different & there's a bit of everything now. Blaggers ITA offers something for everybody.

UK R: *How did a House DJ get into the band?*

MATTY: The reason Christie joined the band was he wanted to come for a holiday when we went to Germany! The condition was that he did a bit of work for us, so we roped him into carrying some stuff & checking us on stage. He started to learn a bit about what the Blaggers were about sound wise. And then during the first gig we dragged him up on stage, really just to embarrass him. But he started ranting away doing an anti fascist rap and it fitted in really well, so we got him in for the second gig and then we said we'd get him down for all our stuff. He was really eager. So we fired him in on the Guns of Brixton cover we're doing for a compilation LP of Clash covers & the rap he did sounds really good in it.

STEVE: And the he bought down a couple of decks & that's where the samples came in. Eventually what we might do when we get to play on a stage that can hold all 7 of us is get a turntable up so we can do the sampling live as well. It's something different & it's all about going forward, not going backwards.

CHRISTIE: All the Frankfurt skins who came to see us started out saying they hated the rave song, but by the end they were chanting for it. They weren't really aware of the direction music has gone over here, with the Manchester sound & all that. It was something new to them but it opened their ears & they enjoyed it.

STEVE: What we did over there for the last gig was buy a load of cheap maracas & tambourines & all the skins were dancing to the rave song shaking these things. It was a comical night.



UK R: *As a House DJ Christie, do you think the rave crowd could ever come to a Blaggers gig?*

CHRISTIE: Yeah I think they could. The point is you can enjoy yourself at a Blaggers gig. You don't have to go mental slamming round at the front of the stage to enjoy us now--you can have a bit of a boogie! And not everyone wants to slam. But we're also playing the punk stuff & you can listen to that but also have a bit of a dance.

MATTY: What we've done to make the rave song more interesting was fire loads of punk bits into it, like there's an Angelic Upstarts type verse in it & then the "If the kids are united" part which is instantly recognisable. It draws everyone into it.

STEVE: It's all cross over. I think it's good to cross as many styles as possible.

UK R: *But do you think a House audience would be open to the politics of the Blaggers as well?*

CHRISTIE: Yeah. Punk has always been against fascism & oppression. Now House has gone a long way to stopping the divide between people because it is a multi-cultural style of music. There's never been a scene which has had fewer problems of discrimination. Discrimination was a big problem with the night clubs in London. Since the rave thing has come along they haven't operated "black quota" door policies which used to be rampant. That sort of thing fell away.

PAUL: One of the most political things about the house scene was the efforts the police used to go to try & stop raves. I mean what is it the authorities are so afraid of that they are prepared to go to so much effort to stop people getting together to have a good time.

MATTY: Maybe we should do a rave version of "Police Oppression"!

UK R: *Are some of the House/rave bands being more up front with the politics?*

CHRISTIE: Yeah. You've got band's like Ruthless Rap Assassins writing "Left, Right & Centre" and they're saying they're a left-wing thing and getting alot of press. They're putting out a lot of good things about say the problems black people have found in this country with very thoughtful lyrics.

STEVE: You should talk to Brendon about the On-U-Sound thing cos he's heavily

into it. I mean look at Gary Clail's new single. It's dead political and it's got really good lyrics in it.

UK R: *So do you think the barriers between musical styles are breaking down so we can no longer talk in terms of "punk" and "hardcore" anymore cos it's all merging in with indie, house and other things?*

STEVE: I hope so. I don't think they've broken down yet. But it's going in the right direction. They've got to be broken down.

UK R: *And does that mean the Bloggers will start to attract a bigger audience?*

CHRISTIE: Yeah. People are enjoying coming to our gigs. It's not that they think that they've got to come along cos they're AFA supporters or they agree with our politics.

UK R: *You don't think you're stuck in a ghetto with the same old audience?*

MATTY: Possibly. But the way to broaden that is by the music. I mean half the people that are into mad noisy punk don't really care about the politics anyway or only in a token way.

UK R: *The problem facing Bloggers ITA. is that the music needs airplay if it is to reach that wider audience. Apart from a Belgian animal rights radio programme using their song "Meat" as an intro, no real radio or music press interest has been forthcoming up to now. But given their new musical inputs, are there more radio stations that might be open to giving them a try?*

CHRISTIE: I think so. I think if we had the rave song, or the new one we did today or "Guns Of Brixton" out on a record we could get it played on some pirate stations. Cos there's a lot of people trying to express an interest.

JASON: I can see the BBC banning our songs because of their political content, though John Peel might play something if he liked it.

UK R: *The band have run up against serious problems in getting a new slab of vinyl out. They thought they had an album deal with Belgium label Hageland Records, but when they found out the terms of the deal they said no--unfortunately they had already lent Verna from Hageland the quarter inch master tape of the songs they had recorded for the album and that tape has never been returned.*

MATTY: The deal he was offering was a total rip off--he just wanted more & more money off us. He wanted £200 of us just to do an album cover after we already had to pay out for all our recording costs. So we said we weren't interested & he got a bit upset. We were supposed to meet him at the end of our Belgian tour but he never showed up & now whenever we try & get hold of him he won't talk to us.

STEVE: The real problem is we can't just remix the recording we've done cos we've heard from people in Belgium he's gonna bootleg it & put the record out without us. OK it won't get UK distribution, but we've lost a lot of money. Other labels won't want to release the same songs because it will be already out in

Europe. We're really pissed off. But he's messing with the wrong people. If he goes ahead with this, he'll have to look over his shoulder for the rest of his life. Bilko was talking of going over there with a shooter!

JASON: Can we take this opportunity to say to anyone in Europe that reads this, if people see the album on sale in a shop or a mailing list, don't buy it and let us know so we can write to them & get it withdrawn. He's just lining his own pockets.

MATTY: At the end of it all, Words of Warning have approached us and said they really liked the single we did and want us to do some thing for them, so were doing a mini LP. We haven't written all the songs yet but it will have the rave song, which is basically about kids being oppressed by the police and it's got an anti-fascist rap in the middle about 3 lads we know who got sent down for 11 years between the for doing some fascists. There's also "10 Years On" which is about the hunger strikes and about how the republican community in Northern Ireland are oppressed by the RUC & British Army. There's also a song we were working on today, which is basically a pop at Thatcher: all these years she spent fucking up this country. It's a song about her & about now she's gone maybe she wont have so much security around her and hopefully she'll get stiffed & then we'd be happy.

UK R: *You couldn't disagree with that. But don't their strong views on Ireland and their up-front support for the armed struggle provoke an adverse reaction amongst their political audience?*

MATTY: All we are saying basically is that it's the choice of the Irish people what they feel they have to do. They're the people being oppressed--not us. So we support what they decide to do. My personal opinion is that the IRA might have got further if they hadn't been prepared to take up arms and fight the security forces. But they've decided that's necessary and we support that. They're the ones fighting the war. Obviously they make mistakes, like that bombing at Victoria Station and there's other things they've done we don't agree with but more than likely 99% of the people within the IRA don't agree with those things. Look at the Harrods bombing they reckon the people who actually did that were severely dealt with.

UK R: *But surely any solution to the problem will have to involve agreement with the Protestants in Northern Ireland, the majority of whom want to remain in Britain?*

MATTY: You have to look at the way the British & Irish governments originally connived the partition of Ireland. Taken as a whole the Catholics are in a large majority in Ireland but the partition of Ireland was designed to ensure the Catholics were in a minority in the 6 counties of the North, so there would always be more people voting against the Republicans.

STEVE: That's why it was split & divided in the way it was--so they could hold a Protestant majority in the North. But the real point people overlook is that the real struggle going on over there is a struggle for the working class, the outcome of it all would be for the benefit the Protestants as well as the Catholic working class. The Protestants would benefit under a united Ireland. The real problem is

convincing them of that.

CHRISTIE: The republicans aren't so stupid as to think you can just ignore & convert people. They realise there are different groups of opinion and you have to take account of everyone's views within a free and united Ireland. Clearly that doesn't go as far as accepting British occupation however.

UK R: *Even if a united Ireland is achieved, the killings won't end because the Protestant paramilitaries will presumably wage a guerrilla struggle of their own.*

CHRISTIE: Well only until the Protestant people see what the UDA & UVF are linked into--fascists like the NF & BNP. They are just terrorist organisations: they exist to terrorise people, especially the Protestant community it's self, into not thinking sensibly about the real situation--the real problem.

UK R: *It's a problem the black majority in South Africa are facing from the terrorist AWB (Afrikaner National Resistance). But that doesn't mean the pressure for change in that country should be delayed because of the threat of a white supremacist terror campaign. It's an unfortunate reality, but something they will have to live with.*

STEVE: The struggle is the same all over the world. People tend to shy away from the issue of Ireland cos it's so close to home. They'll say victory to the ANC, the PLO, the FSLN etc. But when it comes to Ireland they shy away from it but basically it's the same (*something right-wing groups recognise even if the left don't -ed.*) struggle they're fighting in Ireland that they're in Ireland that they're fighting in South Africa, Central America and all over the world. It's a working class struggle.

JASON: Things are clouded by all the censorship that is imposed by the British government on reporting issues connected with Ireland. You're not allowed to report on things which take the other point of view in Ireland. People come up to us after gigs and say "we liked the gig, but we didn't like that song about Ireland." People have got to read up about the Irish situation. Papers like the Sun and Mirror or even The Times, whatever and TV coverage only ever displays one point of view. People should read the history.

UK R: *In Issue 3 1/2 of UKR there was a column from a contributor in Belfast who says that when she looks out of her window she sees the loyalists with their bands and flags, and the republicans with their bands and flags and to her they're just the same.*

STEVE: But isn't she sick of seeing British troops on her streets. And what's the best or only way of getting rid of that occupation force? I mean you just can't say they're two of the same. The thing with the Loyalists is that they're not just Loyalists--the UDA & UVF are fascist death squads.

CHRISTIE: Yeah, the BNP or Blood & Honour papers advertise the loyalist papers. That's the be all and end all of it--they are fascist organisations. You can hold a certain degree of loyalist opinion but once you get in with those sort of groups that is fascism pure & simple. It's exactly the same sort of views as the BNP

etc. with all their views on the holocaust, repatriation and the whole whack. That steps beyond having certain views on whether Ireland should be in or out of England.

UK R: *Blaggers ITA have been very closely involved with Cable Street Beat, which seemed to reach a peak around late 1989, early 1990 with the pickets of Carnaby Street and the disruption of the Blood and Honour gig in London. Has it quietened down since then because the Nazi music has quietened down?*

STEVE: The reason it's quietened down is cos the amount of work needed is a heck of alot and there's only a few people involved. And the people who were involved were also involved with AFA and most of their time has been taken up with anti-fascist activities. But now Cable Street Beat & Anti Fascist Action are affiliated to each other and CSB is sort of the cultural wing of AFA there should be alot more co-ordination between the two & it will be hopefully taking of again. There have actually been quite a few CSB gigs around the country over the last few months, raves & that up in Manchester, Liverpool, Middlesbrough which Sofahead played, the gig we did last week with The Price in Brixton and there's one this week in Glasgow and one in Leicester soon. The thing is were not getting much publicity from the music press. They didn't even bother listing the Brixton gig and that's happened a few times to us. When we've faxed the details of a gig on CSB headed paper and well in advance to the music press, every listings paper & magazine has failed to list it. It's strange. We're gonna have to ask some questions. I think the reason we're not getting good coverage in the music press for CSB is cos they don't see at as trendy anymore. In the 70's with Rock Against Racism anti-fascism was seen as trendy.

UK R: *Why have some left-wing groups like the Socialist Workers Party who supported Rock Against Racism in the late 70's blacked Cable Street Beat?*

STEVE: They don't see the problem of fascism as a up front concern and in actual fact their policy on fascism is shit. I don't like sounding sectarian but the SWP doesn't have a clue how to deal with the problem of fascism it's sad. They wont get involved with AFA as they know they wont be able to recruit new members.

UK R: *Do they have a theoretical disagreements with AFA?*

STEVE: Yeah they disagree. Basically they still think we're squaddists--a gang of mindless hooligans looking for a fight with fascists. They don't see it as a positive thing to do.

CHRISTIE: They say they don't agree with confrontation, and regard us as some sort of gang until the point is reached when one of their static pickets is about to be attacked and then they're very glad to associated with AFA. Basically they are no threat to the fascists, where's Anti Fascist Action is a threat to the fascists and successful against them.

UK R: *Are Blaggers ITA a Red Action Band?*

STEVE: No. There's two members of Red Action and one supporting member in

the band. There's different politics within the band. We've got socialists, a couple of people who lean towards anarchism and one Kinochite! I would say we were an Anti Fascist Action band though.

UK R: *The bands busy schedule was set to continue in May with a mini tour of Greece and an Anti-Fascist festival in Rome on May 3rd with the Angelic Upstarts, in whose resurrection the Bloggers played a part in. How did that happen?*

CHRISTIE: Matty is Mensi's bastard offspring!

MATTY: It's basically because of the problems they had at the Astoria (*a London Oi Festival in April 88 - ed.*). They got smashed up and Mensi wanted to prove a point. They wanted to play a gig for Cable Street Beat and they met the people behind it and thought "Yes, lets do it" and they did the gig at the Robery. Then they did one gig in central London to prove they could play there as well. And after that they got asked to do 3 anti fascist gigs in Germany. But I have to say they're really not that interested in playing anymore. The band are all in their 30's & 40's. They've been doing it for twelve years or mor. They reckon it's for younger people to come through now. They'll do anti fascist festivals and the odd gig. But people keep contacting Cable Street Beat trying to get the Upstarts to do all sorts of gigs but they've got their work to do and they cant afford to keep taking time off to play.

UK R: *Any last comments.*

CHRISTIE: What motivated us to get involved in this and is a large part of our music is the fact that 3 lads got sent to prison after an incident involving a member of Blood & Honour on a Bloody Sunday march last year. One was sent down for 3 years, the other 2 for 4 years each. It was very much a political sentence cos the guy concerned only received 4 stitches. There were set-to's in the court: one copper was done for not appearing in court even though he was one of the main witnesses. The lads are inside, and the Anti Fascist Action Defence Fund has been set up to support them & people like them who are inside to get them the things they need. That's what a lot of the gigs and socials that have been put on have been going towards. We've even had people leaping out of aeroplanes to raise money. Them lads and others like them need our support. If you cant get along to gigs and things what's very important is you write to them, letting them know people on the outside are thinking about and are concerned about their state. If anyone wants to write to Mark, David and Tony, letters of support can be sent via the Cable Street Beat address - BM Box 1734, London, WC1 3XX. But don't write anything incriminating & don't mention the Bloggers.

