

# Anti-Nazi League: DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE

## Anti FASCIST ACTION

The Left's sense of triumphalism after the recent elections is not only misplaced, it is perverse. It is also predictable. When Derek Beackon first received 20% of the vote in October 1992 it was, the ANL insisted, entirely due "to a low turn out". His subsequent victory only months later was put down to "special conditions" on the Isle of Dogs. On May 5th this year the turn out was 70%, more than might be expected for a General Election, and Beackon's vote went up by 560, an increase of 30%. So much for the "low turn out" theory. Now we are told that the Labour victory on the Isle of Dogs means that the ANL "has turned the tide". Once again, reality says otherwise. In the St James ward of Bethnal Green, the BNP candidate polled 653, a 700% increase on the last election. In nearby St Peters ward they got 889 to Labour's 2000. In the Borough of Newham two BNP candidates collectively polled 906, the equivalent of 80% of the total Labour vote. So much then for the "special conditions" theory peddled by sections of the media and the left.

Prior to Beackon's election Socialist Worker boasted: "the Nazis are on the run ... the ANL .. have done a brilliant job ..." The BNP vote went up again this time by 800. Later this BNP victory was described as a "blip". Some months prior to the launch of the ANL in February 1992, its SWP sponsors had dismissed the far right "as no more than a hard core of extremely isolated fanatics." Today little more than two years later, 10,000 votes for the BNP across London is being described as "turning the tide."

Unpalatable though it may be for some, the truth is that support for the far right is growing steadily and there is little the middle class left can do about it. There have been too many lies, and as a result the working class is largely immune to its propaganda. In many areas their tactics simply make them an irrelevance, in other areas the only impact is to undo good work previously done by others. Their politics have little resonance in working class areas and the SWP knows it. Otherwise, instead of being mere cheerleaders for Labour they would stand candidates themselves. As a result of the ANL/YRE ("if you don't want a fascist as a neighbour, vote Labour") strategy, the BNP is now nationally regarded as the radical, and only, alternative to the establishment parties. The ANL

campaign has made a difference: it has increased the Labour vote, but crucially - not at the expense of the BNP. The politics of the ANL is the politics of the SWP, and the politics of the SWP is still the shrill '60s style campus protest: slogans, placards, demonstrations. In simple terms, the SWP/ANL combination has been proved a failure; despite endless media promotion and seemingly unlimited resources it has not even curbed the influence of the BNP. The BNP can be stopped, and on many occasions up and down the country Anti-Fascist Action has physically stopped them. However, we are not blind to the fact that the fight is political and accept that the re-emergence of support for the far right is a symptom of a deeper malaise. We do not see it as our job to campaign for Labour. It is not AFA's role to argue that change is not needed.

The function of anti-fascism is not to see the electoral threat from the far right beaten back, so that Labour and the middle class left can, as happened between 1982-92, turn their backs on both the social causes and their own collaboration in the political betrayals that gave rise to the NF and the BNP in the first place.

The ambition of militant anti-fascism is not simply to see the far-right defeated and removed from working class areas: the ultimate solution is to see them replaced there. The BNP's attack on Labour is from the right, and is racist, ultra conservative and anti-working class. Our primary role is to guarantee that a successful challenge to Labour comes ONLY from the left.

Furthermore, and purely from an anti-fascist point of view, as the best insurance against any nazi renaissance, it would be the duty of militants to offer protection and encouragement to any genuine working class revolt.

**"Dereck Beackon's failure to hang on to his council seat has set back Britain's Nazis... they have suffered a serious reverse."**

**"They [the BNP] are stronger than they were before the election."**

Two quotes from the same article - *Socialist Worker*, 14/5/1994

# Truth Upstaged by Fiction

“When six foot nazis see one little ANL lollipop come round the corner they begin to shake because the Nazi wonders how many other anti-Nazis are round the corner as well”.

(Socialist Worker 18 June 1994)

There are those in the SWP leadership who would like you to believe the media image of the ANL is as fearsome as advertised. Reality says different. Despite all the bluff and bluster about ‘kicking the Nazis off the streets’ the kickings have all been one way. Even before the activity of the ANL merely succeeded in provoking the BNP, SWP paper sales and meetings had been targeted by the fascists. The longstanding policy of the leadership has been to conceal it from the rest of the membership. The reasoning goes that if few people know about it there will be no pressure on them to respond. When an SWP member was beaten up in Birmingham City centre the local leadership issued instructions at the next branch meeting that nobody was to be warned of the attack; ‘we don’t want them to appear bigger than they are’. Even today, after scores of attacks, leadership policy still demands that every attack is treated as if it were an ‘isolated incident’. In January 1992, at a paper sale in south London an ex-party member challenged paper sellers on this very subject: “I know for a fact that you have been attacked six times in the last two months, when are you going to do something about it?” A woman replied, “Oh you mean Barnet?” To which he replied, “well that’s seven then!” The first mass leafleting by the ANL in Tower Hamlets for a decade ended in predictable disaster. Having sleepwalked into a BNP ambush, three people were hospitalised and others sustained injuries... A photographer was stabbed. According to Searchlight this was “one of at least three attacks in the area on the day”. Socialist Worker claimed that the day was “a big success”.

In May 1992 ex-docker Eddie Provost protested in The Somerset Clarion at an allegation made previously in the same magazine; that in an attack by the BNP on an SWP member in Glasgow the victims comrades had responded less than heroically. Eddie stated flatly that the attack itself, rather than simply the eye witness account was probably a fabrication: “I have checked with the SWP national office and the comrades in Scotland, but was unable to discover where the alleged attack was supposed to have taken place”. In reply the magazine published a copy of the front page of the Glasgow Evening Times, which had carried a blow by blow account, and had run the subsequent jailings of four BNP men as its lead item!

The denial of reality is still custom and practise with the attendant consequences. Early in 1994 an ANL stall was attacked and ANL members ‘severley battered’ in Buchanan Street in Glasgow. The following week the ANL were back; with less numbers, almost 50% down on the previous week. A couple of months later the exercise was repeated in Penilee in Paisley. On this occasion 8 ANL members were considered sufficient to leaflet a BNP stronghold. They got

hammered. Next week they returned with 6, two less! Inevitably they were turned over again; young women smashed over the head with half bricks etc. Following the Cup Final in May a joint BNP/ICF mob about 30 strong went on the rampage in Rutherglen, several people were slashed. Earlier two anti-fascists were ambushed and stabbed in the city centre, one lost four pints of blood. A week after an ANL/SWP paper sale had been splattered in Bellshill, a delegate was telling an ANL conference in London that the Nazis had been “smashed off the streets in Glasgow”. (Socialist Worker 18 June 1994)

## What the ANL says it's done.

In its CARNIVAL AGAINST THE NAZIS PROGRAMME 28/05/94, the ANL devotes a whole page to advertising its major successes. Of the 13 confrontational activities listed: Milton Keynes, Huntingdon, Waterloo, Folkestone, Becontree and Camden...European Aryan festival Derby, Bedsworth, Angel Tube, Stoke on Trent, Bloxwich, Victoria and Brick Lane, 12 of the ‘victories’ are either ‘imaginary’- or other peoples.

Of the actual Blood & Honour gigs that were actually cancelled by anti-fascists, not one was disrupted solely on the initiative of the ANL.

**Folkestone 17/09/92** - The counter demo was organised by Kent AFA and supported by Militant and London AFA and the ANL. Militant and AFA were the only groups involved in confrontations on the day.

**Becontree 15/01/94** - Gig cancelled by police after AFA issued a press statement announcing a counter demonstration. Confrontations on the day involved only YRE and AFA. AFA attacked 150 C18 and Blood & Honour skins in the Little Driver in Bow. There were also clashes involving AFA later in the evening at Waterloo.

**The Battle of Waterloo 12/09/92** - AFA’s most famous victory. 15,000 leaflets were distributed the week before at a rain soaked Unity Carnival. Two days before the event an AFA press release predicted ‘maximum disruption...it will be done peacefully if we are allowed, but we are undaunted by the prospect of physical confrontation and in the end it may be like the Battle of Waterloo...’ At one stage five central London stations including Charing Cross and Waterloo were closed ‘due to riots’. There were 44 arrests. The ANL? The ANL held a march in Thornton Heath in south London!

**The European Aryan Festival Derby** - Festival closed by the council, beer confiscated by the police.

**Camden 30/04/94** - A 40 strong wedding reception featuring fascist band No Remorse. The ANL having been sent on another wild goose chase, (on this occasion they had mobilised to stop another Blood & Honour gig in Brixton no

less!) stumbled upon the event when an SWP member went to the pub for a drink. Police were called and the publican closed the pub - locking the fascists in!

## Milton Keynes - (See 'Imaginary Victories')

**Against the BNP**- the ANL claim they've stopped rallies in Bedworth, Angel Tube, Stoke on Trent, Bloxwich, a BNP march in central London and the BNP paper sale in Brick Lane. Bedworth - YRE counter demo. ANL present. No BNP sighted. Angel Tube - ANL counter demo supported by RCP etc prevented small group of fascists exiting from station. BNP rallied at Old Street instead. Stoke on Trent - ANL demo against the NF?. No fascists sighted. Bloxwich - BNP stronghold; not even AFA has disrupted fascist activities there. BNP march - despite 2000 ANL in vicinity of Victoria station, 300 BNP assembled on the concourse and marched to Pimlico where a rally was held. They then dispersed without incident. Brick Lane - It is common knowledge that it was the YRE rather than the ANL who did the business at Brick Lane.

### 'IMAGINARY VICTORIES'

*"The SWP's manic obsession with parading imaginary victories over the BNP leads it far away from a sober and realistic assessment of the battle against racism and fascism in Britain, despite the warning addressed to SWP/ANL spokesperson Paul Holbrow by Searchlight's editor at the beginning of the year that the BNP would only stand 15 candidates. Holbrow's response, that if the BNP stood less than 50 candidates, the ANL would proclaim victory, has set the tone for its subsequent and ongoing dishonesty"*.

(Searchlight magazine April 1992)

*"On the basis of an alleged daubing at Brighton's Jewish cemetery, the ANL called a public demonstration in the town. Many genuine anti-fascists and anti-racists joined the march believing that local fascists had carried out another anti-semitic action. But when the Jewish community's local security organisation, the police and anti-fascist activists investigated, they found the ANL/SWP claim to be totally false"* (Searchlight magazine 1992).

*"As an Anti-Nazi League supporter I attended its recent Merthyr demo in good faith as did a number of Merthyr Cymru Goch members. Some of us had helped to put up posters all over town the week before. The Nazis were due on the 7pm train, but none turned up! This was the third demo organised by the ANL in South Wales. At Barry no fascists appeared and few were sighted at Pontyprid.\* One week after the demo I attended an ANL meeting in the town. We were told that the BNP was going to turn up in Swansea the next Saturday and Newport a fortnight after. I commented that these fascists must be very stupid to go on planning meetings knowing the ANL would be there to greet them. The chairperson (an SWP member from Cardiff) said it was all good publicity anyway. Another SWP member gave a look of mischief which, for me, told more of a tale than evidence...the ANL are 'crying wolf'. Claiming the BNP is going to turn up in order to stage demos, recruit members and sell Socialist Worker. Sooner or later crying wolf will lead to being savaged!"*.

(Letter in Y Fanner Goch Summer 1994)

In March 1993 the ANL called a picket on a pub on the Netherfield Estate, Milton Keynes. The information that Blood & Honour were to use it as a redirection point for a gig, was exclusive to the ANL. When challenged, fascist graffiti adorning the pub was provided as corroborative evidence. This information when checked proved to be false. The ANL picket arrived to find the pub shut on the instructions of police. Understandably the locals who had been provided with no information were less than impressed. Though no fascists had been sighted, the picket was suddenly galvanised by a shout that somebody was being attacked behind the pub. The immediate reaction of the organisers was to call up the coaches and the immediate reaction of the pickets was to clamber onto them. This hadn't been the organisers intention; but after a brief discussion the hour long picket was declared a 'success' and the ANL departed.

**"Only one thing could have stopped our new movement - if our adversaries had understood it's principle and, from the first day, has smashed with the utmost brutality the nucleus of our New Movement."**

Adolph Hitler. (quoted in the ANL Carnival Programme, May 1994)

**"The Catford Third Way Nazi candidate was found leafletting on his own last week. Local council workers set up an ANL stall in response."**

Socialist Worker, May 1994

## What does the ANL stand for?

*"The ANL organises by ACTIVITY. It's what you do that matters. Writing letters, petitioning and lobbying all play a part in pressurising those who have the power to make decisions - like closing down the BNP HQ...or protecting a family who are being racially harassed...every attack has been met with vigils, processions, pickets of police who offer no protection, and demonstrations...Every one needs to link arms against the Nazi threat. It is time to act...KEEP UP THE PRESSURE"*. (Carnival against the Nazis programme 28 May 1994)

*"It is interesting to be told by people who have done none for the last ten years that what counts is ACTIVITY. The SWP goes so far as to say 'we are for confrontation'. However to this is added the rider 'but only through mobilising large numbers of people'. One cannot find anywhere a statement that organisations like the BNP, frustrated by inability to emulate their European counterparts and driven from political weakness in the direction of terrorism, should be opposed on principle irrespective of whether 'large numbers of people' can be mobilised"*. (Searchlight magazine April 1992)

\* The 'few fascists sighted at Pontyprid' we are reliably informed were local lads and had nothing to do with the BNP.

January 1994 - ANL mobilise to stop BNP meeting in Barry. BNP scouts spotted but left the redirection point unchallenged by the ANL. Later AFA informs ANL where the BNP meeting is taking place. ANL dismiss the information and accuse AFA of 'scaremongering'. Then having declared victory they disperse. The BNP meeting attracts an attendance of 50 plus.

On the 1st of May 1993, after AFA had stopped a planned rally in Colne by taking over their meeting place, the ANL held a static rally in the town centre a mile away. Confronted on the issue of the use of violence by the Lancashire Evening Telegraph, an ANL spokesperson stated; "We have the same aims as AFA, but don't necessarily agree with their more direct methods".

In the run up to the local elections in Rochdale in May 1994 ANL leafleters were kicked off Newbold estate. On election night itself, ANL leafleters were chased away from a polling station. Later an ANL picket of Rochdale Town Hall where the count was taking place moved meekly aside to accommodate a BNP contingent of about 30 who then occupied the Town Hall steps. When shortly afterwards AFA stewards removed the BNP, the action was dismissed by the ANL as 'tokenistic'.

Birmingham 30/04/94 - About 40 ANL had mobbed in and around a local pub when the BNP candidate and five canvassers walked around the corner. As three AFA members approached

them; four fascists including the candidate fled leaving the others to be acquainted with the pavement. When the ANL did make a move it was to intervene on behalf of the fascists! The ANL members shouted "enough is enough" and "discipline comrades" as they tried to pull the AFA members off the BNP. To avoid arrest the AFA members immediately left the area to the sound of the ANL singing "Can you hear the Nazis sing..."

In the summer of '91, when the 'Nazis were not a threat', the forerunners of C18 were using SWP paper sales in various parts of London as target practice. Because other sellers were left ignorant of the fascist activity they too became victims. Attacks took place in at least seven areas with weapons that included rock filled socks and iron bars. Two years on the fascists do not need to use violence against the SWP, threats are often enough. The fascists, by simply entering the venues for branch meetings and threatening to smash them up, have caused at least three London SWP branches to abandon pubs. At Beachhead and Whitechapel, though the landlords said they were prepared to face down the threats, the branches declined to stand up for themselves. When six foot Nazis see one little ANL lollipop...?

## Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics

Of all the ANL propaganda perhaps the use of statistics to underline the argument; that they have 'turned the tide' against the BNP, is the most disingenuous. The use of statistics 'prove' the SWP argument, that the support for the far-right is on a DOWNWARD curve since electoral support across the country for the NF peaked in 1977.

*"The Nazis are increasing their votes in getting up to 30 per cent in some areas. Although there are comparable figures from the 1970's they hide some important facts. In the Greater London Council elections in 1977 the NF contested EVERY seat. This time the Nazis had 23 candidates across London...today they are much weaker numerically and organisationally."*

Nobody would deny that they are STILL weaker numerically and organisationally compared to their peak in 1977. What the SWP use of statistics is intended to disguise is that the far-right is since 1990, on an almost vertically UPWARD curve. Support for their politics is widespread and getting stronger particularly in working class areas. The fact that they are getting 'comparable' votes to the 70's, despite having a much weaker infrastructure proves only that their politics now have GREATER resonance.

The 135,000 votes for the various groups on the far-right\* in the European election, and incidentally excluding the BNP, is further evidence of this potential.

The launch of the ANL in 1977 stopped the NF's progress; the Tory election victory two years later in 1979 where Thatcher played the race card finished them off as an electoral

threat. Though the NF collapsed into warring factions they did not go away. Nor is it true that they were defeated by the ANL then, nor is it true now. The idea behind the downward graph is to reassure the SWP's membership and to conceal the damning statistic that the relaunch of the ANL in January 1992 has simply coincided with the biggest surge in support for the far-right in Britain for over twenty years. In contrast to its impact in the 70's this time round the launch of the ANL would not register on any graph. After two years of frantic ANL activity and having exhausted (with the notable exception of squadism) its entire repertoire of publicity stunts, marches and carnivals, the BNP, and now even the various splinters of the NF, are still making steady, and, by their own standards spectacular progress. In addition race attacks are reported be running at a recorded high of 130,000.

In October 1992, nine months after the ANL relaunch the far-right got its best vote for a decade; 20% on the Isle of Dogs. Only eighteen months later, in the East End alone the 20% benchmark was topped by a dozen BNP candidates. Ironically in one vital respect the ANL are correct; the situation today bad as it is, is NOT directly comparable to 1977. At least not yet. Unlike the National Front then, the BNP or the other groups on the far-right have not peaked. The real question is of course - has the ANL?

\* During the Euro elections the UK Independence Party enjoyed the support of the Revolutionary Conservative Caucus, whose leading member is Stuart Millson, an associate of John Tyndall. The New Britain Party, was founded in the 70's by National Front and Monday Club renegades.