

London antifascist conference sabotaged by sectarian politics of its organizers

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Along with other questions, the registration form for the International Militant Anti-Fascism Conference in London in October asked if participants wanted to play football.

Once I arrived, therefore, I wasn't surprised when the convening group, Anti-Fascist Action (AFA), turned out to be almost entirely male (not that women can't be gridiron contenders!) But I was delighted to see women introducing delegations from Scandinavia, Germany, Spain, and the U.S. Contingents also attended from Scotland, Ireland, England, the Netherlands, France, and Canada, and I represented United Front Against Fascism, a Seattle-based education and direct action organization.

Our goal was to discuss forming an international anti-fascist network. But unfortunately, AFA turned out to be vehemently sexist and anti-communist. Its political deficiencies sabotaged the conference - which, due to AFA's outreach, was overwhelmingly white and did not include groups representing immigrants, sexual minorities, Romanis (Gypsies) or Jews, all main targets of fascist violence.

AFA's leaders blame the current resurgence of fascism on the "old Left," which they believe is dead and discredited. They focus AFA's energy on trying to keep communists out of "their" movement rather than on uniting anti-fascists against the ultraright. Ironically, they are following the tragically wrong path of the German Communist Party in the 1930s; the CP saw reformist socialists as worse than the Nazis and refused to join with them to stop Hitler.

The good news: AFA's views were not held by the majority. Strong young Scandinavian feminists, both women and men, joined me in opposing any exclusion or censorship of the Left.

Moreover, conference-goers shared an understanding of fascism as a capitalist phenomenon, an outgrowth of severe economic crisis. The new contacts made among these savvy anti-Nazi fighters could still lead to the creation of an international alliance -- outside of the AFA's stultifying grip.

And with brownshirts around the world now promoting their bigoted program in the electoral arena as well as on the streets, such an alliance is urgently needed. Its builders will be those whose guiding principle is solidarity, not sectarianism.

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