



Police move in on protesters who believe fascist violence should be met with anti-fascist violence. Photograph: Andrew Testa

Tea and loathing on Dover seafront

by John Sweeney

YOU COULD hear the clink-clink of cups being gently let down on saucers as the elderly clientele of the Churchill Hotel tearooms took in the alien invasion of Dover Beach.

The genteel tea-drinkers watched a phalanx of Neanderthals clunking their knuckles along the prom yesterday, Union Jacks above them, 16-hole Doc Marten bovver-boots at their feet.

The National Front, all 60 of them, was out in force in the Kent port to protest against the arrival of Gypsies from what used to be Czechoslovakia. They came for a march; it

ended in a rumpus, and they fled from Dover before they could rally.

And from the eerie quiet of the tearoom it was evident that the National Front were the real aliens. Two police choppers see-sawed high above; out to sea a harbour police launch sliced through the grey waves.

The marchers were roaring 'Rule Britannia' to the accompaniment of the barks of the police Alsatians when the counter-marchers arrived in force. Suddenly everything turned nastier as the NF and the counter-NF fed off each other's hate. The NF were ugly, but some of the anti-NF were not very pretty either. One fat

job sported a peroxide-blond ponytail underneath his black balaclava as he baited the police; another swore viciously at his comrades, his face contorted in hate.

The anti-fascists numbered about 300 and could be divided into four: fresh-faced students from the Anti Nazi League, the direct action road protesters who look like Swampy and could have done with a bath, the Class War anarchists who probably think Kropotkin is a class A drug and the Anti-Fascist Action (AFA), a bunch of crewcutted hardnuts who believe that fascist violence should be met with anti-fascist violence.

The police set their dogs on

the AFA crew, expecting them to move, but the AFA hunkered down: bitten but not shy. There was something homoerotic but weirdly impressive in this acceptance of pain: somebody at Keele University should write a thesis about it.

At one point the police lost control and the two sides could have had a battle had they wanted it. Instead they threw away that particular opportunity and a courtship ritual continued: 'Want some? Come on then.'

Then the police took control again and the National Fronters queued politely to get on a coach like a party of Saga holidaymakers after a trip to a bingo hall.