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### Original Citation

Thomas, Paul (2010) Marching Altogether? Football fans taking a stand against racism. In: Sport and Challenges to Racism. Global Culture and Sport Series . Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 185-198. ISBN 9780230236158

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**Dr. Paul Thomas** is a Senior Lecturer in Youth and Community Work at the University of Huddersfield, UK. Paul's PhD was on Community Cohesion work with young people, and current research focuses on multiculturalism and identity. A season-ticket holder at Leeds United football club for over twenty years, Paul was a co-founder of the Leeds Fans United Against Racism and Fascism campaign and was later Chair of the International Committee of the national Football Supporters Association.

## **Marching Altogether?** **Football Fans taking a stand against racism**

**Paul Thomas**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on an anti-racism campaign by a group of fans at one particular English football club, Leeds United, and the cultural change it helped to bring about amongst the club's match-going fans. In describing the campaign and highlighting some of the key issues involved, it hopes to suggest points for consideration, not only by those working against racism across a variety of sporting situations, but also for anti-racism generally. In doing so, the chapter is not offering the Leeds Fans campaign as a 'model' of good practice, as there were plenty of limitations and mistakes involved. Nevertheless, it was one of the pioneering, locally-based initiatives that have helped transform English football over the past twenty years from perhaps the most public manifestation of endemic racism in Britain to a situation where, whilst there is still much to do as the work of the Kick it Out Campaign shows, many of the more positive facets of multicultural Britain are now on display in the stands as well as on the pitch. The author does not subscribe to the view that the sharp decline of racist behaviour in and around English football grounds was an inevitable result of the increasingly multicultural make-up both of teams and of the society as a whole; the significant lurch towards xenophobic intolerance in previously liberal states such as the Netherlands and Denmark argues against the cosy inevitability of anti-racist success. The real progress against racism in English football has been hard-won, sometimes through struggle and conflict, and the aim here is to identify key components and issues within that progress at one particular football club. To do this, the chapter first provides some background detail of Leeds United and of the Leeds Fans United against Racism campaign, before discussing key themes and issues.

### **Leeds, Leeds, Leeds!**

Few teams polarise opinion amongst English football fans more than Leeds United, yet until the early 1960s, Leeds had never been a significant force. In a city arguably dominated by Rugby League, United had mostly bumbled along in the English second division. This all changed when Don Revie became manager, and within 10 years of their promotion to the top division in 1964, Leeds had

become the most famous and arguably loathed team in the land. Two league championships and three other cup triumphs hardly told the story, as Leeds finished League runner-up five times, mostly when they should have won, and lost a number of high profile cup finals and semi-finals. The most famous of these defeats came in the European Cup Final of 1975 against Bayern Munich, when blatant refereeing injustices led to defeat and to fans' rioting that resulted in a European ban. Many neutrals rejoiced in these defeats, as Leeds were seen as the epitome of the ruthless and hard-faced new era of professional football. The catchphrase 'dirty, dirty Leeds' stuck, as highlighted in the recent feature film adaptation of David Peace's powerful novel, *'The Damned United'*, but many others also acknowledged that Leeds, with their stable team nurtured by Revie and their fierce collective spirit, played some of the best football seen in England in the post-war period. Just as the team rose, so it fell, with the departure of Revie to the England job, and retirement of the key personnel leading to a decline culminating in relegation in 1982.

Leeds also polarised opinion off the pitch, with the 1970s being the highpoint of English football hooliganism, and Leeds were also top contenders there. Additionally, as the 1970's went on, racism and fascist agitation became an increasingly overt element of English fan behaviour, reflecting wider social issues and conflicts (Solomos, 2003; Gilroy, 2002). Large-scale racist chanting inside the ground and fascist paper sales outside the ground became a regular feature at Leeds United's Elland Road ground in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as it did at many other English football clubs. Anti-racist campaigners such as the Anti-Nazi League attempted to respond, but this racist reality continued unabated at Elland Road throughout the 1980s. Former Guardian sports journalist Nick Varley was a Leeds fan at the time, and in *'Park Life'* (1999), his excellent analysis of the state of English football in the 1990's, he recalled the racist reality of his trips to Elland Road as a young fan in the 1980s:

*The most shocking aspect was really just the fact of it, the unashamed, unpunished, almost unremarkable mass public display. And the revelling in it.* (Varley, 1999: 136).

Varley goes on to describe in detail the vicious racist abuse directed at Mickey Brown, a young Black player for Shrewsbury in a game in the 1986/7 season. At that time, the then-dominant fascist organisation, the National Front had a visible presence at Elland Road and at many other football grounds, selling their newspaper and youth magazine, *'Bulldog'*. In this pre-fanzine era, *Bulldog* was arguably a (racist) trailblazer for later (non/anti-racist) fanzines in its jokey and foul-mouthed style, with the 'Racist League' being a particularly popular feature amongst racist football fans. Here, racist fans at different clubs attempted to move up the 'league' through overt, regular racist chants and taunts. Leeds were always near the top, competing with Newcastle, Aston Villa, Chelsea and West Ham. Our campaign regularly witnessed such magazines sold in their dozens, and sometimes hundreds at Elland Road in the mid-late 1980s. Whilst organised

racist chanting and fascist agitation was more obvious at some clubs than others, racism was rife across English football, reflecting the reality of day-to-day-popular racism, whereby the tabloid newspapers had spent the 1970s creating a moral panic around 'Black Muggers' (Hall et al, 1978), and where Mrs Thatcher had ridden to power talking about people feeling 'rather swamped' by 'coloured immigration' (Solomos, 2003). Alongside this was the issue of local histories and cultures, as Dave Hill's (2001) examination of the racialised context of Merseyside that set the scene for John Barnes's high profile move to Liverpool in the 1980s illustrates. Leeds has a long history of racial tension and fascist agitation, going back to the significant Jewish immigration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the attempt of Mosley's fascist Black Shirts to exploit it ending in violent disturbances close to the Elland Road ground in September 1936, just weeks before the seminal 'Battle of Cable Street'. Modern fascist groups also attempted to exploit tension around the significant Asian and African–Caribbean immigration to Leeds and Yorkshire from the 1950's onwards. In football, as in society, far-right groups were **not** causing racism, but in football, and especially at clubs like Leeds United, they were very actively fuelling and encouraging racist behaviour, providing a real focus and identification for some young working class men, as the graffiti common in West Yorkshire in the 1970s and 80s, '*Leeds Utd- NF*', illustrated.

It was in this context that a new, fan-led anti-racist initiative commenced in 1987, kicked off by match-going Leeds fans who were also involved in wider anti-racist work and who were sick of the racist atmosphere at Elland Road on a Saturday. Firstly a loose collection of fans uniting under the banner of the Leeds Trades Union Council, and subsequently as Leeds Fans United against Racism and Fascism, the campaign aimed to decisively change the culture at Elland Road through overtly challenging both racist behaviour amongst fans and the ongoing fascist political agitation in and around the ground. This was done initially through distribution of anti-racist stickers, leaflets and fixture calendars, and subsequently through the regular anti-racist fanzine '*Marching Altogether*', which was published several times a season. The campaign continued until 1995, when it was judged to have done its job. Subsequently, a number of the key activists have been involved in the national Football Supporters Association and particularly in its International work which has attempted to combat racism and xenophobia and create a more positive and inclusive atmosphere around England International games. The years that the campaign did operate in were tumultuous, with campaign members assaulted and threatened by fascist activists in the early stages, but decisive victory in our own terms achieved. Similarly, on the pitch, Leeds United went from the bottom of the second division in 1988 to being Champions of England in 1992. Dull, it wasn't!

### **The reality of conflict**

The universal English disgust at the racist abuse faced by England's Black players during the November 2004 friendly international in Spain, and the support from all part of the English game for Kick It Out's annual anti-racist events suggests that that progress to anti-racist consensus has been smooth and conflict-free for English football. The experience of our campaign at Leeds was that this was far from the case, as the people and the institutions holding the real power over the experiences of ordinary football fans had to be dragged kicking and screaming towards progress. Arguably this has been, and possibly still continues to be, the case in English football more generally.

The Introduction outlined the grim, racist reality that had prevailed at Elland Road for a decade or more prior to our campaign starting in 1987, yet the people under pressure were **us**, the anti-racist fans who wanted to change things for the better. Having given West Yorkshire Police polite notice that a group of anti-racist fans would be handing out leaflets in a peaceful and organised manner at a future match, the Police themselves, the club and the local media all immediately swung in to action to dissuade us, and to portray the *anti-racists* as the trouble-makers. Such attitudes were graphically illustrated by a story titled 'Political violence feared at matches' in the Yorkshire Evening Post (YEP) in late September, as the campaign prepared for the first leaflet session in October. Superintendent Jack Clapham, the officer responsible for match-day policing at Elland Road where racism and fascist organisation had been a reality for many years was quoted as saying:

*My worry would be that the actions of this group will provoke a reaction from the National Front. It could prove a busy day for us when we are keeping rival fans apart.*

(YEP, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1987).

This attitude that talking about racism is a much greater problem than racism itself was clearly shared by Leeds United itself, as following a highly successful first leafleting session, with a positive reaction from fans, the club secretary was quoted as saying that he had 'no idea' who was behind the leaflet (YEP 26/10/87) and threatening legal action for our use of the club badge on the leaflet, even though pirate merchandisers had been selling material with the same badge with impunity for years. They also refused to meet to discuss the issue, only agreeing after considerable political pressure from the late Labour MP for Leeds Central, Derek Fatchett. Astonishingly, Leeds United questioned our analysis of a major problem and challenged us to produce evidence, in what proved to be a crass error of judgement. The fact that in a FA Cup tie against Aston Villa shortly beforehand, several of Villa's Black players were pelted with bananas in the pre-match warm up only made us more determined to make the club face reality. The result was the publication of our report '*Terror on our Terraces*' (Leeds Trades Council, 1988) in March 1988, which received substantial coverage in national media (*'Fascist racist and violent – club branded*

*a breeding ground for the NF thugs*' – Daily Mirror, 29/3/88). The national media coverage was fiercely critical of the raciest reality of Elland Road and the lack of action against it, *'Exactly the widespread and critical publicity the club was anxious to avoid. They conspiracy of silence was completely broken'* (Varley, 1999:149).

As Leeds fans, we had no wish to drag our club through the mud, or to confirm the lazy stereotypes outsiders held about Leeds United or its city, but the club had given us no choice through their refusal to recognise reality, or to show any sort of moral courage. This was emphasised by the fact that **none** of the evidence contained in *'Terror on our Terraces'* was new, and had all been culled from previous media reports. That included the findings of the Popplewell Enquiry in to rioting at the Birmingham City against Leeds match in May 1985 where a teenage boy died after a wall collapsed. Popplewell identified racist behaviour and fascist organisation as key elements of the very serious and prolonged disorder, including whole groups of Leeds hooligans parading in Nazi arm bands, but this evidence had been over-looked by the attention given to the Bradford City football ground fire where over 50 people died. The fire occurred the same day as the Birmingham riot, was also covered by Popplewell, and understandably received all the media attention. The *'Terror on our Terraces'* evidence also included details of several racist attacks, clearly highlighting the use of match days as a contact hub for fascist agitators. This was illustrated by an earlier, undercover investigation of Leeds National Front by YEP reporters who first made contact with the fascists at Elland Road.

Coupled with details from 'participant observation' of racist chanting, and of regular fascist paper-sales and recruitment at match days, the *'Terror on Our Terraces'* report proved to be a tackle that the club couldn't ride, and they knew it. At the preceding and subsequent matches, Club anti-racist leaflets signed by the manager Billy Bremner and all the players were waiting for fans at the turnstiles, and it was clear that a watershed had been reached – the club had been forced to reconsider their position through an overt external challenge, with change coming through conflict rather than through consensus. The overtly political approach of our campaign also included meetings with key councillors within the Labour-controlled Leeds City Council. Leeds Council actually owned the Elland Road ground, having bailed the football club out earlier in the decade, and as local residents we wanted to know why they weren't taking action against racism in the ground. The support of the Local Trades Union Council and local MPs meant that we were soon talking to the Deputy Council Leader and that the local councillors on the Club's board who hadn't previously seemed to notice the racism were suddenly threatening to ban racists from all council facilities! Similarly, the Police Commander so critical of our initiative suddenly 'moved on to other duties' and was replaced with a new commander who immediately held a long and constructive meeting with the campaign, leading to a significantly changed police attitude on match days in the following seasons.

The further development of the Leeds Fans campaign and its effects are explored below, but there is a clear conclusion here about the need for hard-nosed organisation and the willingness of fans to engage in overtly 'political' campaigning if necessary. Indeed, there is arguably a clear parallel between our local campaign at Leeds and the wider national initiative 'Kick Racism out of Football' (now Kick It Out), which has developed to the point where English football is rightly seen as a model of good anti-racist practice by other European football authorities. The Kick Racism out of Football campaign was established in 1993 during the initial season of the re-branded Premier League and the associated Sky pay TV deal, making it arguably part of the modern re-making of football that has brought a mixture of positive and negatives in the eyes of most match-going fans. A key issue is that the Kick Racism campaign was **not** initiated by the Football Association or the other professional football bodies. Instead, it was a campaign aimed at those bodies by outsiders, including the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the government quango charged with enforcing legislation against racial discrimination and with promoting good race relations. The then Chair of the CRE (and now Lord) Herman Ouseley put considerable effort behind the campaign and continues today as the Chair of Kick It Out. This has been a consistent effort from the outside to persuade football to change. The other key players in the founding of Kick Racism were the Professional Footballers Association, the 'Trade Union' of professional footballers. The PFA, under the clear and positive leadership of Gordon Taylor, Garth Crooks and Brendan Batson (the latter two showing how political involvement by Black footballers themselves has been a vital component), were no longer prepared to see their members racially abused on a routine basis, and have played a vital role over more than 15 years in persuading high profile footballers and managers of all ethnic backgrounds to take clear public anti-racist stands in support of the campaign. From the start, Kick Racism out of Football was about using a mixture of public events and private meetings to persuade, or even force, the world of football to change its stance and to take meaningful actions against racism. Whilst space here does not permit a full analysis (see Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001 for more on this), it's clear from the past decade and a half of the campaign that getting governing bodies and individual clubs to genuinely engage has been a long and painful process, involving conflict and the use of the media to 'pressure' them, a larger-scale parallel with the experience of our campaign at Leeds United. Nationally, this job is clearly far from complete, given the mishandling of the launch event for England's bid to host the 2018 World Cup (*'World Cup 2018 Bid in crisis talks to defuse race row'*, Guardian, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2009), where not a single ethnic minority speaker was scheduled, despite the multicultural reality of the national game, and the fact that ethnic diversity had been one of the key factors in clinching the 2012 Olympics for Britain.

### **Reclaiming *our* club**

The description above of the depth and scale of the racist reality at Leeds United by the mid 1980s does suggest that the characterisation of Leeds by some

outsiders as a 'racist club' with 'racist fans' was accurate. As match-going fans, we were well aware of the problems but didn't accept the generalisation about our fans, or about their club and city. In starting our campaign, we believed that the clear majority of Leeds fans were against racism and intolerance but didn't currently feel able to do anything about the racism all around them on match days, beyond keep their heads down and try to blot it out. Our overriding aim of 'reclaiming our club' goes, I would suggest, to the heart of effective anti-racist strategies, both in sport and in wider society, in what it assumes about people and how it approaches 'community'.

Ours was not the first attempt to overtly tackle racist behaviour and fascist organisation at Elland Road. The national growth of the National Front and their increasingly assertive presence at Leeds United on match days in the mid to late 1970s was met by regular leafleting by the Anti Nazi League, a coalition largely organised by the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party but containing well-intentioned anti-racists of all backgrounds. Nationally, the ANL and the parallel organisation Rock Against Racism played important roles in combating the surge of popular support for the NF (Gilroy, 2002). RAR, in particular, in its live music events provided 'spaces' for young people of different ethnic backgrounds to come together and experience both anti-racist unity and some cultural synthesis (Gilroy, 2002), and the movement was certainly a formative anti-racist experience for the author and many of his generation. There was, however, never a parallel national movement aimed at football, although individual managers like Brian Clough and Jack Charlton gave messages of support to the ANL. The result was that at Elland Road, the well-meaning ANL leafletters were largely outsiders, not Leeds, or even football, fans, and they were not familiar or comfortable with the culture and history of the club and place. This was reflected in their literature, with wide generalisation about 'racists' and 'nazis', and somewhat problematic assertions about 'kicking the racists out of football' when the anti-racists clearly weren't part of football themselves. This limited the impact they could have, and they also faced real intimidation from far-right activists and racist fans. Additionally, the NF showed real doggedness, consistently leafleting and selling papers year after year, whereas the national decision of the SWP to downgrade the ANL in favour of other 'struggles' handed the initiative to the fascists. The implicit message here, rightly or wrongly, was that Leeds fans were not a 'community' that the anti-racists were truly part of or felt long-term attachment to. The perception on both sides was that the far right had 'won' at Elland Road, leaving many anti-racists to fear or even demonise Leeds United and their fans, sometimes with good reason, given the use of Elland Road to recruit hooligans for involvement in racist and fascist activity. Many anti-racist fans stayed away from the ground, and I was often viewed with frank surprise in the late 1980s when telling people that I went to Leeds games. This concept of having 'lost' could be applied to the city as a whole, with NF paper sales taking place every Saturday morning in the very centre of Leeds, and the NF having office premises.



This experience left some clear lessons for the Leeds Fans United against Racism and Fascism campaign to learn. Some of these were applied in the early leafleting sessions of the 1987/88 season. The very first appearance at the ground involved us taking almost one hundred campaign supporters in an organised convoy and leafleting in a disciplined and stewarded line. Many of these people were not Leeds fans, but rather committed anti-racists. Our intention in recruiting them for this activity was straight-forward – we were not going to be intimidated or even attacked in the way ANL leafletters were in the 1970s, as we knew such a setback would strangle the campaign at birth. These numbers had a positive effect on our own confidence and a real effect on fans – one teenage fan wandered past saying, *‘\*\*\*\* me, seen how many anti-racists there are!’* The size of our anti-racist contingent clearly encouraged many ordinary fans, with countless coming up to take leaflets and thank us for doing it, whilst visibly agitating the much smaller group of fascist paper sellers. Another key point was that, although many of our campaign leafletters were active in different political groups, we made a strict condition of participation that no other political literature whatsoever should be displayed or distributed; instead the focus was just on our leaflets, which were addressed to Leeds fans in accessible anti-racist language, with reference to recent team events and no concern with any wider political agendas. Interestingly, the Leeds SWP refused to participate in the campaign because they couldn’t sell their own political newspapers.

Whilst this approach was highly successful, limitations soon became apparent, as a minority of Leeds fans questioned the credibility of some leafletters. Watching one fan press a clearly uncomfortable non-Leeds supporting leafleter by asking *‘So, who plays left-back for us then? You don’t know do you? Do you know the names of anyone in our team??’* convinced us that we couldn’t go any further on that basis without falling in to the same trap as the ANL of the 1970s. From then, only genuine Leeds fans took part in leafleting sessions, and we launched our fanzine *‘Marching Altogether’*, a free magazine clearly written by and for genuine fans. The facts that the content of the fanzine could only have been written by regular match-goers, that the same people were seen outside the ground distributing it time after time, and that we could then be seen inside the ground were all crucial to the credibility we developed over time. The contrary fact that NF paper sellers did not go to the games, instead packing up and leaving before kick-off, was something that we noticed and highlighted to fans consistently. This coupled with the evidence in the *‘Terror on our Terraces’* report helped us to plant and promote the idea with fans that the National Front, and implicitly, the ideas they stood for, were ‘outsiders’ with no interest in or commitment to Leeds United, and who were doing nothing but giving ‘us’ a bad reputation. We knew we were making progress on this strategy when we observed fans going out of their way to approach NF papersellers and say things along the lines of, *‘\*\*\*\* off, Hitler lovers!!’*. Phil Cohen (1988) has identified how racism has often been deployed in close-knit British working class areas as a form of defence for a quasi-biological ‘community’ against ‘outsiders’ but that local identity has also been a real block historically to the spread of fascist

political influence. Cohen identifies how such understandings of local autonomy and pride were deployed in East London in the 1930s to counter Mosley's Black Shirts. Our campaign had a similar experience as we managed to portray fascist agitators and, by association, vocal racists, as 'outsiders' indifferent to the image and pride of 'our' club. Leeds fans have always had an 'us against the world' mentality, and our success in portraying racists and fascists as part of 'them' who wanted to damage Leeds and its fans was crucial to our overall success. Here, we squarely aimed at changing the '*Leeds Utd. NF*' reflex of many young fans in to a contrary '*Leeds Utd. against NF*' position. The fact that we, and hence Leeds fans, received complimentary media coverage in a BBCTV 'Sports Night' piece and a Channel Four documentary '*Great Britain United*' all helped to accentuate the positiveness of our campaign to the club, at a time when the team's fortunes were also steadily improving. This was re-enforced by dogged leafleting and fanzine production, financed only by donations from fans, season after season. The contrast with previous and unsuccessful approaches was highlighted around the end of our campaign in 1995/96, when the SWP had decided nationally to resuscitate the ANL as a 'front' campaign for their far-left political party. ANL activists, led by a coordinator wearing an Arsenal baseball cap (we were playing Newcastle that day) appeared at our pub and asked us the way to the ground so they could go and leaflet! When they did find their way there, they received an extremely negative reception from fans as they'd appeared out of nowhere and their leaflets had nothing to do with Leeds United or football, instead berating people about 'racists'. The contrast was instructive.

A related issue here is obviously the personal motivation of fans leading an anti-racist campaign. As regular fans and season ticket holders, we regarded the club and fellow fans as a 'community' we were part of, not as something to be picked up and put down again when we fancied. Leeds United was and remains a big part of our lives. Whilst we held great empathy and anger about the abuse Black players and fans had been forced to endure at Elland Road, our motivation was more personal than that. Indeed, at a public meeting in Manchester to launch the Kick Racism out of Football campaign, PFA Deputy Chairman Brendan Batson commented that, whilst he appreciated fans campaigns, he '*didn't need other peoples' help*'. Having been a pioneer on the field in the 1970s, Batson's views are understandable, but we weren't carrying out our campaign to 'help' Brendan or other Black players. Our motivation was that our own values meant that we couldn't and wouldn't stand on the terraces and accept racism all around us, we weren't prepared to go home after games feeling dirty by association, and we weren't prepared to be driven away from somewhere we were profoundly attached to.

### **Starting where we were at**

A frequent, and often justified, criticism of anti-racism is that it pays too much attention to fascist and organised racist groups, rather than the deeper and 'taken for granted' everyday reality of racism (Hall et al, 1978). Additionally, in a

football context there has been concern that racism and hooliganism have been portrayed as synonymous in that racists and violent hooligans have been seen as one and the same as deviant 'others'. Indeed, in discussing our campaign, Back, Crabbe and Solomos (2001) suggest that: *In order to mobilise support against a readily recognisable foe and win support from the authorities the report 'Terror on our Terraces' unconsciously helped to establish the parameters of debate within the confines of the racist-hooligan couplet* (p.188). They do go on to acknowledge why this approach may well have been needed, but whilst I don't agree, their thrust is understandable. The '*Terror on Our Terraces*' report and the associated media coverage described above was a calculated move to force Leeds United into acknowledgement of the problem and action. This meant that, to a certain extent, we were tactically using the role of fascist groups within football violence to provoke more widespread anti-racist actions. Similarly, it is clear that media portrayal of the rioting that forced the abandonment of the 1995 Ireland – England friendly international match in Dublin as inspired by far-right group Combat 18 both forced and enabled the Football Association to strengthen its commitment to the fledgling Kick Racism campaign. Our subsequent priority as a campaign was **not** on the club and its actions, but on fan culture, believing that this was the only thing we could directly influence and change as fellow fans.

Here, our significant focus on fascist groups, their impact on racist behaviour and their links to violence around Leeds United in our fanzine and leaflets was because of the historic reality outlined above. The racism of wider British society, arguably directly connected to colonialism and empire (Gilroy, 2002), provided the origins of the blatant racist behaviour at Elland Road, but the long-term presence of groups like the NF was both an accelerant and a symbol, with that presence making many ethnic minority and anti-racist white fans feel that they could not go to Leeds United whilst fascists were there. Similarly, the violence quoted in '*Terror on Our Terraces*' was not the sort of pre-planned meet-up between consenting groups of rival hooligans that predominates today (Varley, 1999) but blatant and violent racial assaults, sometimes on entire groups or communities. For all these reasons, we had to focus on fascist groups, both because of their real impact, and because of the wider cultural battle that they had come to symbolise.

In doing so, we were well aware of the need to engage with day to day racism of 'law-abiding' ordinary fans, with a number of us closely involved in anti-racist educational practice as teachers or youth and community workers. Close examination of the twenty-something issues of '*Marching Altogether*' suggests that there was indeed a clear engagement with mundane racial prejudice and discrimination. For instance, Issue no. 1 of September 1988 had an article detailing the British birth and education of many Black players of the time, directly engaging with popular prejudices about 'foreigners' and immigration (*'This...clearly shows that all this 'send them back' stuff is a complete load of crap*), whilst later issues focussed on racist comments, such as the statement by Crystal Palace Chairman Ron Noades that Black players couldn't be relied on in

the winter - he'd clearly never met our very 'robust' Black defender Noel Blake! In focussing on our current Black players, and past Leeds heroes such as Albert Johansson, the South African winger who was the first Black player to play in an FA Cup Final in 1965, we were able to debate the stupidity and hypocrisy of racially abusing opposition Black players. In producing our popular annual fixture calendars (which always had multiracial images), we invited fans to put up overt pro- Leeds/anti-racist material at home and in their workplaces. As fans, we knew the impact that such debates in the fanzine provoked, not only through the letters we received and the fans who came to talk to us outside the ground, but because we could overhear conversations on the terraces. A frequently overheard conversation in the early stages was along the lines of '*you can't say that any more...*'. In fact, it would be years before the club took such proactive measures; instead, such conversations represented the self-adjustment to fan cultures and assumptions that we'd helped to provoke.

In trying to change the norms of fan culture from within, we were, and identified ourselves as being, part of a wider fan's movement. We drew support and inspiration from an informal, fledgling network of fan's anti-racist campaigns, such as the 'Geordies are Black and White' campaign at Newcastle United and the 'Foxes against Racism' initiative at Leicester City. The wider 'fanzine' movement was growing rapidly across the country at the same time, with many fanzines taking overt positions against racism and fascism. The term 'fanzine' may not be recognisable internationally (cartoonist Big Dave, who was starting to learn French, explained our fanzine as '*c'est un magasin de fanatiques!*' to a clearly bemused Eric Cantona at the party to celebrate our 1992 League Championship triumph), but fanzines were and are strictly unofficial magazines, written by and for ordinary fans, and reflecting the robust wit, wisdom and language of the terraces. '*When Saturday Comes*' emerged as a progressive national fanzine at a time when much national newspaper football coverage was poor and sometimes racist, whilst fanzines bloomed at every club. In establishing our fanzine '*Marching Altogether*', we were part of that movement. What made us unique was two things; firstly that we were the only fanzine nationally established to promote anti-racism; secondly, our fanzine was free! Our thinking here was that we knew some fans would buy it, but we wanted to communicate with fans less likely to buy fanzines, especially younger fans who had been attracted to racist literature in the past. As a result, we produced several thousand copies of each issue of our fanzine and distributed them outside the ground, using them as a tool for conversation with fans. This idea of the free fanzine provided the inspiration for the '*Free Lions*' fanzine, produced for all England International Games by the Football Supporters Federation (formerly the FSA) International group (Miles, 2000). From the first issue of '*Marching Altogether*', copies went quickly, with fans pleading for copies when we'd already run out!

Within the fanzine, we overtly made connections with wider fan's issues. This wasn't a tactic to ingratiate ourselves, but because we saw anti-racism as part of a wider perspective on the rights and responsibilities of football fans generally at

a time when they were treated like scum by the Police, football clubs and politicians – these were the people who gave us the appalling conditions and treatment that culminated in the Hillsborough disaster, then tried to blame fans themselves for it. Yes, there was unacceptable hooliganism in the period, but collective punishment seemed to be the order of the day, and in those conditions all sort of anti-social behaviour, including racism, was likely to flourish. This feeling was two-way, with the Football Supporter's Association making us one of the first recipients of their 'Services to Soccer' Award, a huge boost to our confidence. We petitioned Leeds fans against the Identity cards for football fans proposed by Mrs Thatcher, we publicised the Hillsborough 96 Justice campaign and the culpability of South Yorkshire Police in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster, and we highlighted the 'safe standing' campaign. In doing this, we were prepared to be overtly critical of the football authorities and our own club at the same time as pressuring them to do more about racism. These fan's issues weren't an add-on to campaigning against racism, they were part of a wider perspective that demanded dignity, equality and respect for **all** football fans and participants, and our credibility with fans grew because we were genuinely just as concerned with those issues as our core, founding issue.

### **Trusting the fans**

Both racism and wider fan's issues were discussed in our fanzine in robust and irreverent ways, in keeping with the approach and appeal of fanzines generally. This included a great deal of humour, with one of our most effective and popular anti-racist features being the regular cartoon-strip '*One Hundred and One things to do with a Nazi skinhead*' (unsurprisingly, things never turned out well for the aforementioned racist...). We also had a '*Crap Haircuts*' cartoon, and regularly selected the 'Football ugly eleven'! Our belief was that we were more likely to change people's thinking through making them laugh, particularly if we were mocking racism and intolerance, rather than lecturing them in 'heavy' language. We saw this as a contrast to the leaflets and newspapers of many anti-racist campaigns and political parties that are often turgid and hectoring. As discussed above, we were well aware of the dangers of focussing on overt fascist groups (Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001), but these cartoon strips were responding to concrete realities within our fans. For a while, the cartoon became '*One hundred and one things to do with a Ku Klux Klansman*' because at the crucial away game in Bournemouth at which promotion back to the top division was clinched in May 1990 there was considerable violence, some of it overtly racist in character, and the ring leaders of the latter were a significant number of fans dressed in KKK gear. The cartoon was aimed at isolating them and the 'taken for granted' racism that they traded on. The cartoon had originally been focused on 'Nazi Skinheads' because that's who we had outside the ground selling racist newspapers on a regular basis! At one game against Chelsea in 1988, we had almost 30 Skinhead and Casual Nazis leafleting at the ground, a hugely intimidating reality for many ordinary fans, and that's why we used crude but effective humour to isolate and ridicule them. In doing this, we had twin aims of

avoiding 'preaching' or lecturing and of appealing to what we firmly believed was the majority of 'ordinary decent fans' (a phrase we used consistently), both of which raise wider issues around how to develop an anti-racism that is genuinely effective, both in sport and wider society. As highlighted above, a number of the key campaign personnel were involved in anti-racist educational activity in their day jobs, part of a movement that has had a real impact on attitudes and cultural practice in society.

However, anti-racism has also had limitations and problematic features. This has been particularly evident when it has focussed on white working class young people and their communities, with some analysts detecting a 'white backlash' (Hewitt, 2005) from such communities. The evidence here is that significant numbers of white working class young people felt that they were being judged negatively and treated partially by anti-racist policies in schools, youth clubs and other settings that saw much of their language and behaviour as 'racist', and so punished it, whilst not applying the same scrutiny to people of different ethnic or social backgrounds. For instance, confrontations between young people of different ethnic backgrounds were seen as inevitably 'racist' on the part of the white young people, who were judged accordingly, rather than a more complex understanding of motivation applied. At the same time, anti-racism and multiculturalism appeared to 'celebrate' different ethnic minority cultures and religions whilst having nothing but criticism for traditions and norms of old-established white working class communities (Hewitt, 2005). Much of this appeared to be as much a class-based condemnation, with middle class professionals quick to seize on the 'racism' of working class communities before retreating to their largely monocultural suburban enclaves. We were determined as a campaign not to appear to be judging or condemning ordinary fans, or be dismissive of the wider fan culture at Elland Road of which racism was currently a part. That explains why, contrary to critiques (Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001), we **didn't** link racism and hooliganism, or have a problem with aggression towards the opposition, as we highlighted in our response to anti-semitic chanting in match at Tottenham during the championship-winning 1991-92 season: *Hate Spurs because they are flash, niggly, time-wasting Cockney bastards, but leave this Jewish shit out... That's what Belsen means – millions of innocent people dead.*

(Marching Altogether, No.14, 1992)

That also explains why we prioritised the wider fan's issues (I and thousands of other Leeds fans still don't sit down at games to this day, even when 'ordered' to do so by jobsworth stewards).

An associated criticism of 'anti-racism' was that, with its simplistic dichotomy of White= powerful, Black = oppressed, all white people were seen as inherently racist, ignorant and guilty (with the opposite implicitly implied for all non-white people) (Bhavnani, 2001). As a campaign, we rejected this view as wrong and unnecessarily pessimistic. Instead, we believed (and continue to believe) that the majority of ordinary decent people are fair-minded and not sympathetic to crass

racist prejudices. Our approach was to appeal to them and empower them, both by ridiculing and culturally isolating the blatant racists, but also by subtly and steadily influencing thinking and assumptions through fanzine content that didn't preach but instead made people both laugh and think. From that perspective, even fans who had engaged in racist chanting or comments on the terraces in the past, should not necessarily be quickly condemned as 'racists'. Indeed, in the early years of the campaign, we had a steady stream of fans coming up to us to say that they had joined in like sheep in the past and now realised that it was hurtful, stupid and wrong. We are all products of our cultural surroundings, and we were trying to nudge the cultural norm at Elland Road from an open acceptance of racism to the opposite. Just as we did not accept the simplistic notion of 'racist' fans, so we were not under any illusions that fans were now 'anti-racist'. Here, helping to create a norm of non-racist behaviour, and self-policing of it, amongst fans was our realistic goal within the context of a problematic wider society. Self-policing was a key value for our campaign and the wider fan's movement that it was part of, and we had concrete evidence of it developing around racism. In the years following the campaign's end, we witnessed a number of incidents where racist comments or confrontations amongst fans were met on each occasion by a number of different fans telling the racist/s to shut up in no uncertain terms, as well as making formal complaints. The fact that Leeds United followed up with firm and effective action against the racists (I had personal experience of a racist I confronted and complained about having his season ticket cancelled) was a bonus, with both aspects demonstrating the huge cultural change that had taken place at Elland Road over a decade.

One of the limitations for anti-racism in wider society has been how it has been perceived as yet another way in which people in power such as teachers tell working class people what to do, think and how to behave, with this limiting its effectiveness (Cohen, 1988). For that reason, whilst firm action by clubs against racist behaviour is to be welcomed, there is the danger that 'official' anti-racism can be seen as another way of clubs telling fans what to do, so inviting some fans to test 'authority': *attempts to impose further external controls on fan racism can all too easily be read as part of a perceived strategy to change the match atmosphere* (Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001: 198). We had an illustration of this in the early part of this century at a time when we were flying high in the Premier League with a vibrant, multicultural team and a positive fan atmosphere, with a clumsy and heavy-handed 'Kick Racism' video shown on the big screen every half-time to a mixture of profound indifference and bemusement. Similarly, the parade of anti-racist banners at Elland Road and other grounds as part of the annual 'Kick Racism out of Football' week is greeted by some polite applause but also with a *'whatever'* attitude from some people as it's the club telling them what to think, totally unconnected with the actual local situation.

The danger of clumsy anti-racism that is trying to impose an agenda, rather than responding to real issues amongst fans was shown at Leeds by the

Bowyer/Woodgate affair. In early 2000, just as Leeds United were making an audacious bid for the Premiership title and European glory, key young players Jonathon Woodgate and Lee Bowyer were involved in a violent assault on a young Asian student. It was clear that a vicious attack had taken place, but was it a racist assault? The fact that Bowyer had a previous racially-aggravated conviction meant that campaigners like the National Campaign for Civil Rights were talking about a 'racial attack' long before prosecutors had even considered the evidence. In a febrile atmosphere, Leeds fans divided. A small minority expressed their stupidity, and possibly racism, by lauding Bowyer at every opportunity; another minority booed, and the large majority said nothing, failing to clap Bowyer but keeping their counsel until they knew the real facts. In this context, we were urged by national football campaigners to resurrect our campaign and leaflet 'against racism', but our response was that we didn't know the facts about whether it was 'racist' or not, there had not been a racist response at the ground and that any leaflet would be counterproductive. Predictably, the ambulance-chasing SWP turned up at the ground and received an overwhelmingly hostile response from fans. In fact, prosecutors did not bring racially-aggravated charges, Woodgate was convicted and Bowyer was cleared. Whether racism really was a factor or not, both had clearly played a role in a cowardly attack, and most Leeds fans were glad to see the back of the pair of them when they moved on.

### **Conclusion: Where we are now**

As a season ticket holder watching Leeds United play in the third division in 2009/10, the campaign described above feels like it's from another time in another country. It's some years since there were any reports of racist chanting amongst Leeds fans. There is no guarantee that an occasional match-goer would not find themselves sat next to a racist, but my experience is that any complaints about racist comments are dealt with promptly and seriously. Ironically, this changed atmosphere has not affected the open homophobia, with chanting regularly marring matches against Brighton, which is perceived to be a 'gay' town, a problem finally being recognised nationally by the Football Authorities (*'Kick Homophobia out of Football'*, The Guardian, 18<sup>th</sup> August 2009)). The ex-Leeds player celebrated most regularly is the Black South African defender and all-round hero Lucas Radebe. Leeds United does reflect the ongoing national problems of continued ethnic minority under-representation generally in the stands and lack of Asian presence on the pitch (Bains and Johal, 1998), although the emergence of a young, Leeds born Asian player, Harpal Singh, a few years ago created genuine excitement amongst many Leeds fans. His failure to break through didn't alter the fact that many fans are keen to see Asian players at a time when Ravi Bopara, Owais Shah and Monty Panesar are part of the England cricket squad. The culture of English football, of which racism was once a part, has changed, largely for the better. Some of this is because some working class young men have been priced out, but racism has largely disappeared because



fans and society **have** changed, and fans campaigns like ours at Leeds have played a positive role in that process.

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