

RED ACTION

MANCHESTER BULLETIN

NUMBER 9

FREE

RUNNING SCARED!

On Thursday 5th May, activists from Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) confronted and chased off a large number of BNP members from the steps of Rochdale Town Hall.

The BNP had gathered at the Town Hall in an attempt to intimidate political opponents attending the count for the local elections. The effectiveness of the AFA operation severely embarrassed not only the BNP, but also the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) who had moved meekly aside to allow the BNP to occupy the Town Hall steps.

Up until that point, the BNP's election campaign had been a fairly quiet affair. They had called no public meetings, marches or rallies in support of their 3 candidates in Rochdale, and had instead relied on low-level leafleting, and letter writing campaigns to local papers (particularly the Rochdale Observer). Whether this was due to orders from BNP headquarters in Welling, or due to the number of beatings the BNP have received in the past when they have tried to organise in public remains unclear, but we strongly suspect the latter.

Three weeks before polling day, a BNP leafleting team narrowly avoided annihilation at the hands of an AFA Stewards Group when they fled Rochdale after their scouts had spotted the AFA group. No BNP leaflets were distributed in Rochdale that day!

In between times, AFA handed out thousands of leaflets on the estates in which the BNP were standing without encountering a single BNP member.

On Polling Day itself, AFA activists maintained a presence in Rochdale from 11am onwards. Again no fascists were spotted, but we understand that the ANL were chased off from a polling station in the early evening. At 6.30pm, a group of AFA members gathered at a pub near the Town Hall and waited patiently for the arrival of the BNP. By 11pm it became obvious that the BNP would not show while AFA maintained a presence outside the Town Hall (The 3 candidates and their agents had already been smuggled into the Town Hall in the back of a police van).

Therefore the AFA contingent decided to temporarily withdraw from the Town Hall. On cue the BNP arrived.

Taking advantage of AFA's seeming departure from the scene, the BNP broke cover and marched boldly up the Town Hall steps, which at that point were occupied by the ANL. The ANL response was to meekly step aside and wave their stupid yellow lollipops at the fascists (perhaps white flags would be more appropriate). At this moment, the departing AFA contingent returned. The BNP fled before the AFA charge, with half of them fighting with the police in a panic-stricken crush to squeeze through a single door into the safety of the Town Hall itself, while the other half scattered into the ranks of the ANL. The effect of this was to cause the ANL to scatter before the retreating fascists and police in a sort of domino effect. It is a strange breed of anti-fascist that believes you can defeat fascism by running away from it.

After the dust had settled, the BNP were no longer in charge of the Town Hall steps, 3 anti-fascists and 1 fascist had been arrested and charged, the ANL were shame-faced, and AFA was the only organisation who could legitimately claim a victory. In the words of a gang of Asian youth who had initially joined the noisier ANL picket, but have since been swayed by AFA's more direct politics "Respect to AFA".

A Defence Campaign has been set up to raise funds for the 3 anti-fascists arrested. They have been charged with various public order offences including Affray. If you wish to make a contribution please send donations to the Rochdale Three Defence Campaign, c/o PO Box 83, SWDO, Manchester, M15 5NJ.

FIVE ARRESTED IN TOWN HALL FRACAS

SCUFFLES broke out between BNP supporters and a group calling themselves Anti-Fascist Action as people started leaving the Town Hall count.

Two policemen were slightly injured as they got between the two groups, during which a bottle was thrown.

Police ordered the doors be kept shut and were only re-opened after 20 minutes.

A police spokesman said: "One group

appeared to be from the Anti Nazi League. Some bottles were thrown and this was how two officers were injured.

"During the confrontation five people were arrested. They have been charged with public disorder offences and will appear at Rochdale Magistrates Court on 9 June."

A man claiming to be a spokesman for the Anti-Fascist Action told the **Observer** that

his members had confronted the BNP on the steps of the Town Hall.

He claimed some 30 BNP supporters had intimidated people arriving for the count.

He said: "We moved in to remove them from the steps, and they turned tail and fled."

"We make no apologies for what we did. As far as we are concerned, the operation was a complete success."

Rochdale Observer. 7 may 1994.

RED ACTION - PO BOX 83-SWDO-MANCHESTER-M15 5NJ