

# WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO BEAT THE FASCISTS ?

THE WORKING CLASS, ANTI-FASCISM AND THE SWP, by RED ACTION.

Recent articles in the SOMERSET CLARION have focused upon the nature of the fight against fascism and in particular, the role of such organisations as the SWP on the one hand, and Red Action on the other. With new anti-fascist organisations springing up like mushrooms in recent months, the debate concerning their role and strategy is more relevant than ever before.

After years of denying that the fascists were a significant threat, the SWP has surprised everyone, especially its own members, by re-launching the ANL. SWP member Eddie Prevost predicted in December 1991: "under conditions of rapid growth of fascist organisations the SWP will once again seek to play a role in their defeat." Presumably the spurt of "rapid growth" occurred over Christmas! The point about the autocratic and unrepresentative leadership within the SWP could hardly be more graphically illustrated. Only a few months ago, the SWP paper was dismissing the fight against the fascists as a "sectarian pastime" - the line which Eddie Prevost was still defending in December. The ANL Mark 11 presumably signals a re-think. The fascists are to be seen as a significant threat after all - as Red Action has long insisted.

Red Action (with Workers Power, the DAM and others) has for a number of years supported the programme of Anti-Fascist Action - of ideological and physical confrontation with the fascists. There are two principal components that distinguish AFA's strategy against the fascists from that of other left groups.

The first is the putting into practice of the slogan "No Platform for Fascists". The second is the insistence that the fascists represent a qualitatively different threat compared to the bourgeois parties and their state structures. Not all forms of capitalist reaction are identical in the danger they represent to the working class. One consistent thread uniting the theories of the principal players on the left is their claim that socialists should concentrate their energies on fighting the racist 'system' and its Tory representatives. As Eddie Prevost claims: "What (Red Action) fails to comprehend is that the existence of fascists is endemic to the capitalist system itself."

Andrew Newman concurs: "In Britain today, the main source of racism is the government and police, not fascists." This analysis recalls the Stalinist position of the Thirties according to which fascism and bourgeois democracy are "twins" and consequently should be equally opposed. Like other ultra-left positions, it appears to represent the pitch of revolutionary commitment and analysis.

In practice it is a cop-out. As Trotsky said, "it is a policy invented to paralyse the working class". For in practice: "This means we have to renounce the whole struggle, for all contemporary evils are 'products of the capitalist system'". The slogan, "The Tories are the real enemy" means in effect, "Leave the fascists alone" (and hope they leave you alone!)

Even worse than this, in the end it means relying on the state to contain the fascists as did reformists in both Italy and Germany during the rise of Mussolini and Hitler. It means relying on police lines to protect you from fascist thugs when you chant, "police protect the fascists". It means

calling the police to remove fascists when they disrupt your paper sale. It means, as at Bermondsey, relying on the riot police to batter a path for you from an estate that would otherwise tear your heads off, as you chant, "Who are the fascists? The police are the fascists!"

But fascism is not identical with bourgeois democracy. Nor is it just a case, as has already happened in France and is now happening here, that fascism provides the impetus and pretext to drive the bourgeois state to increasingly reactionary postures. It is primarily, as Trotsky put it, a "battering ram", and "a razor in the hands of the class enemy", the bourgeoisie, when democracy fails in times of crisis: "The historic function of fascism is to smash the working class, destroy its organisations, and stifle political liberties when the capitalists find themselves unable to govern and dominate with the help of democratic machinery." Trotsky explains: "To struggle, it is necessary to conserve and strengthen the instrument and the means of struggle - organisations, the press, meetings, etc. Fascism threatens all of that directly and immediately."

The beginning of this process is precisely what we are witnessing in Britain today, and which is well under way in other parts of Europe. All those who oppose the physical struggle against fascism, as Trotsky rightly says, are its "unconscious helpers", since, "Nothing increases the insolence of the fascists so much as flabby pacifism on the part of the workers' organisations."

So what, according to Trotsky, writing as he was during the rise of European fascism in the Thirties, is the correct response of the working class to the emergence of the fascist threat? His arguments are not those of the SWP or Militant, but of Red Action! In the Thirties, Trotsky had many occasions to polemicise against the Stalinists who were then proposing precisely those arguments that Red Action encounters from the conservative left today.

He doesn't say that you must march against the racism of the bourgeois establishment. He doesn't say that you must lobby Trades councils, enlist 'key people' in the Trades Unions, or even organise in the colleges. He says, "Proletarian combat detachments must exist and be educated, trained, and armed." Disarming the fascists with "newspaper articles alone is impossible. Fighting squads must be created." This approach is elaborated: "A strike is inconceivable without propaganda and without agitation. It is also inconceivable without pickets who... use persuasion, but when obliged, use force. The strike is the most elementary form of the class struggle which always combines, in varying proportions, ideological methods with physical methods... He who thinks of renouncing physical struggle must renounce all struggle..."

The pacifists on the left claim that "mass self defence" is the answer - without in Trotsky's formulation, 'combat organisations' or 'specialised cadres'. In Eddie Prevost's words: "The only power that can remove the capitalists and their lackeys the

fascists, is the power of the working class. We in the SWP have no illusions that we have the ability to rid the world of these thugs." This assertion sits oddly with the general SWP line that the fascists are "extremely isolated" as voiced by Andrew Newman in objecting to Jeff Baxter that, "he thinks the fascists are a much greater threat than we do". Putting that aside, what such 'mass defence' advocates fail to ask is how it is that if you can't organise even a numerically weak movement, you can ever expect to arrive at a strong one. The argument for 'mass defence' - all or nothing - then becomes in practice an argument for no defence. For: "without organised combat detachments, the most heroic masses will be smashed bit by bit by the fascist gangs. It is nonsense to counterpose the militia to self-defence. The militia is an organisation of self-defence."

But wouldn't such organisation mean "provocation" of the fascists? As Trotsky says, this is an "absolutely reactionary" argument. "Liberalism has always said to the workers that by their class struggle they 'provoke' the reaction." It is the philosophy, he points out, of Tolstoy and Gandhi but never of Marx and Lenin.

Why does this argument based on provocation, as if the fascists were so many wasp's nests sleeping peacefully until some idiot pokes them with a stick, find so much favour with 'revolutionary' organisations? Trotsky points directly to the real motivation: "It is nonsense to say that in itself the organisation of the militia leads to adventures, provokes the enemy, replaces the political struggle by physical struggle etc. In all these phrases there is nothing but political cowardice."

How else should the working class to defend itself? Ideologically? Sadly this actually means, as Trotsky himself puts it: "In other words: they (the anti-fascists) can only hide themselves." He adds, and all the evidence backs him up to the hilt, where a policy of physical confrontation is systematically implemented, "the recruitment of new fascist bands will become incomparably more difficult."

The proponents of 'mass defence' against the incursions of the fascists, then maintain that physical response by what Trotsky terms "combat detachments" (and what the SWP terms 'squadism') is harmful because it divides the detachments from the masses. He answers: "But why then are there independent armed detachments among the fascists who are not cut off from the reactionary masses but who arouse the courage and embolden those masses by their well-organised attacks?"

Trotsky outlined the only possible option for the anti-fascists: "The political campaign must be openly developed, in meetings, factories, in the streets and on the public squares." This in itself will inevitably lead to physical confrontation with the fascists. It is a condition of any anti-fascist action of any kind - the only honest alternative is to admit that the fascists are too strong to be opposed, which in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. For if they are too strong now, while they are still at a relatively undeveloped stage, they will be far too strong later.

Only determined and concerted action from the left can avert the danger of a mass base for fascist politics. They must be met with direct and coherent action now. The central argument is really very simple: so simple, Trotsky put it in the form of a fable which provides a fitting conclusion: "A cattle dealer once drove some bulls to the slaughterhouse. A butcher arrived with his sharp knife. "Let us close ranks and kill the butcher with our horns" suggested one of the bulls. "But in what way is the butcher any worse than the dealer who drove us here?" replied the bulls (who had been reading Socialist Worker). "But we shall be able to attend to the dealer afterwards!" "Nothing doing" replied the bulls, firm in their principles. "You are trying, from the left, to shield our enemies - you are a social butcher yourself." And they refused to close ranks."

F Gordon  
Red Action

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The anti fascist article by Eddie Prevost, an SWP member, in the last Clarion has sparked a lively reaction. In Britain now there exists a tragic-comic situation of THREE separate anti-fascist organisations, where there should be only one, and that based firmly on an alliance between the organised working class and the Black Communities. This article, defending workers' self defence squads, was received late, but has gone in as an outstanding socialist polemic. We apologise for the necessity for the very small script.

Dave Chapple.