

BLACK AUTONOMY

WHY BIG FLAME OFFERS UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT

(Note: the idea for this article came out of discussion about an article written by JH for the Journal. This is an effort to take up one element of JH's piece - the question of black autonomy - and make this into a Journal article. So it is written in my 'Journal' style, rather than in my 'Conference document' style. Whether or not it is deemed acceptable for the Journal will depend on Conference discussion, and the opinions of the Editorial Board.)

Introduction

Considering the amount of attention the white far left gives to the struggles of black people, it might seem surprising that there is almost no effort by white revolutionaries to spell out its theoretical and practical positions on black struggle. This article is an attempt by Big Flame to contribute to the debate amongst the white left on this question. It is tentative, incomplete and, some will say, superficial. It starts with BF's theoretical position on the state of working class struggle and the basis for a revolutionary party, which is bound up with our uncompromising support for the autonomous activity of the various sections of the working class. It then moves to a closer look at the various expressions of black autonomy. Then, in the light of a discussion of the political problems posed by racism, fascism and social democracy, the article tries to suggest a proper role for the (white) left.*

By the end of the article it will be fairly clear why there is a 'surprising' lack of discussion on black struggle by the (white) left. It is extremely difficult for white revolutionaries, especially those of us who have been processed by universities, to really come to grips with black politics. The worst of us shout about bosses plots to divide workers, and Carry On Intervening on the assumption that black politics are the same as white politics. The more sophisticated talk about the legacy of imperialism, the material basis of racism, and try and recruit those black people who have also been to university. Others spend years living in black areas, 'being sensitive' to local politics, and wondering why black militants still think they are as bad as the rest of the white left.

All three political methods tend to be justified on the grounds that some black people are attracted to the party/organisation/or action group. None of them seem able to face the fact that, when black people themselves take mass political action - whether it be at Imperial Typewriters or Notting Hill Carnival - the white left plays no real part. Rather than reveal its weakness by discussing its relationship with the black working class, the (white) left remains silent. In trying to break this silence, we in Big Flame are conscious that we may patronise and reduce the complexity of the black struggle. That we do so is an indication of our own political poverty. But we are sure that it is better, in the long run, to reveal our own inadequacies than to pretend we have it all sorted out. We can then learn from our mistakes.

AUTONOMY AND THE PARTY

The usual response to Big Flame's support for the autonomy of the black working class and its organisations is that we are encouraging divisions inside the working class. Only a united revolutionary organisation of blacks and whites can provide the necessary leadership for the whole of the working class, they say. We agree that the question of autonomy cannot

* I use the notation '(white) left' to refer to those far left groups which are predominantly white, but which contain some black members

be separated from the question of the nature of the revolutionary organisation and, ultimately, the question of the party. But these questions have to be related to the present state of class struggle and the political tasks facing militants. They cannot be resolved by an appeal to a timeless principle called The Party.

This view is not, of course, particularly original, and many revolutionaries will pay lip service to it. This disagreement on autonomy really flows from different perspectives on the present state of class composition and struggle. The basic difference is over what we see as the obstacles to the development of a credible revolutionary pole inside the working class. Everyone has realised that the revolutionary left has failed to live up to the promise of the events of 1968 and the upsurge of workers struggles up to 1974. Instead the Labour government has effectively silenced opposition to its ruthlessly conservative policies, and now looks set to create a sufficient illusion of well-being to win the next election.

Various explanations have been offered for this setback to the left. The Communist Party, unaware of the real role of the 'left' leaders it has been courting, uses the experience of Chile to argue for more of the same: building an alliance of progressive forces which, when it comes to racism and fascism, apparently includes the Conservative Party. Trotskyists argue about whether or not to enter the Labour Party, but they are agreed that the failure to really dent the L.P.'s appeal among the working class is the source of the setback of the past 3 years. People who have recently left the Socialist Workers Party argue that the party's leadership is wrong in its view that reformism can be broken simply by economic struggles, but the SWP itself has only recognised the existence of a setback to the extent that it has changed its tactics, but not its basic economism, in launching campaigns directed at black people, the unemployed and youth (The Right To Fight, The Right To Work and The Right To Pogo campaigns).

Whatever the results, in terms of membership of the the changes in direction made by the various left groups, we believe that their analysis of the failure of the left is too simplistic. The role of the Labour Party, with all its ideological weaponry, is obviously extremely important. But we have to understand that the LP has been so successful precisely because it has such a fertile ground to work in. It is not just a matter of Labour adopting the wrong policies, and putting over the wrong ideas. If it were as simple as that we would have more sympathy with the idea of entering and trying to change its policies. Labour has these policies because they reflect the views of a divided working class - a class which is used to sectional struggles around partial demands, used to compartmentalising its struggles around a particular workplace or community, and making demands which only meet a small part of its needs.

This sectionalism and the ideas that go with it has a material base. The working class is divided because certain of its sectors have greater material power than others. Thus factory workers in general have more power than the unemployed, men have more power than women, older workers have more power than school students. What is most relevant to this article, white workers have more power than black. Because of the rewards that go with these power differentials, the more powerful are, in general, reluctant to give up their privilege.

It can be argued that the role of a revolutionary party is to win people to campaigns around demands which overcome these divisions, demands which express the common needs of all these sectors of the class. In our view, such campaigns at the present time will have limited results. That is not to say they should not be launched: the Socialist Unity campaign is working on these lines, and we fully support it.

But the majority of people in each sector of the working class will not be won over to a campaign which, more often than not, is external to their daily lives - a fact recognised by those groups which attempt to build permanent branches in factories and communities. We know that only by a continuous and close relationship with the daily struggles of the mass of workers, struggles in which the slogans and assistance of militants can be demonstrated to work, only in this way can an effective revolutionary organisation be built.

In the context of this article the question that arises is: can white revolutionaries have this close and effective relationship with the black working class? In 99 cases out of 100, the answer is 'No'. Our experience is too far removed from that of black workers. Even if we were able to make real links with a particular group of blacks in a workplace or community, the experience gained would have only a small amount of relevance to the struggles of black people from different countries.

Our argument is that the black working class needs its own organisations to reflect its own needs. No white organisation can do this. The material and cultural situation of black workers is too far removed from that of white workers. They are exploited more mercilessly, they have even less of the limited protection offered to whites by trade unions, and many of them are divided from white workers by language, religion, history and tradition.

This is not to put race above class as the determinant of our politics. The two are inseparable, since the very existence of a black sub-proletariat in this country owes itself to the race and class of the white imperialists. It is merely to argue that the white left cannot assume that the fact that black and white workers share the same relationship to the means of production implies that they can always share the same revolutionary organisation. The fact of race crucially affects the kind of politics that comes from the white and black sections of the class.

It may well be that, in the present period, there will be overt conflict between the black and white sections of the working class, and not just the conflicts fermented by the fascists. This conflict is secondary to the major conflict between the working class and the capitalist class, but it is real enough, and cannot be wished away by abstract calls for unity. Since there are real divisions within the class, there will be real conflict. Class unity cannot take place until such struggles have been won by black workers, and white workers have realised that their real interests lie in taking power from the bosses, not maintaining their power over black people. Class unity can only be meaningful on the basis of the strength of the sections which are at present weak.

At this time, however, the black working class is divided even in its own ranks. So there is no surprise in the fact that there are a multitude of groups representing different islands, different religions, and different political positions. There are some groups which contain people of both black races, but it is likely to be some time before such organisations take off. Instead we are likely to see the steady growth of the small groups based on the class and cultural needs of a particular community. As more and more Asians and West Indians grow up in Britain, subject to the common discipline of selling their labour or surviving on the streets, faced with the same racism and developing similar conflicts with the traditions of their parents, we can expect greater unity between the two. This unity is already being forged on the streets in the common struggle against the police and the fascists.

There can be no useful talk of a united revolutionary party, containing blacks and whites, until this process has developed a lot further than it has so far. When the black groups have settled their own affairs, when the socialist current in each community has established real influence,

and when these groups close to unite across racial lines, then there may be a basis for union of blacks and whites, assuming that a similar process has occurred among the white tendencies, and assuming that we have become the dominant force in the working class.

Unity on this basis should also eliminate the invidious position most black militants experience inside white organisations - the subservience of their needs, and the needs of the black working class, to the needs of the white organisation. The kind of unity we envisage is that of a strong black organisation inside a mass revolutionary party, so that the demands of the black working class have a permanent and forceful place inside the party. Clearly, this situation is some way off, and will only come out of a far higher level of class struggle than we have now.

But there is no short cut. There is no place for the conjuring up of a revolutionary party out of a few thousand militants, and handful of whom are black. The full development of an autonomous black movement is an essential prerequisite for an effective revolutionary party.

THE BLACK GROUPS TODAY

It is impatience with the existing autonomous black groups which drives many revolutionary blacks into white organisations. As the following brief survey shows, there is at present no real sign of an effective black revolutionary organisation emerging. But, fifteen years ago, the same would have been said of the white revolutionary cells, and while we are a long way from the revolutionary party, the prospects are not so grim as they were. Considering the added difficulties facing black revolutionaries, it is heartening to see the degree of organisation and activity inside the black working class.

In discussing the present black groups, we immediately face two issues: the class orientation of the groups, and the degree of national organisation. In most cities there exist cultural, political and religious groups within each black community, often with overlapping membership and frequently divided according to their political aspirations. Here we restrict ourselves to the political groups, though one of the strengths of the black communities is the close relationship between what we tend to separate as 'politics' and 'culture'.

Asians

Each ethnic group has its own political organisations. The Indians are best organised at a national level, though the Indian Workers Association is split into two separate groups, one pro-Moscow, one pro-Peking. Both branches of the IWA exist in most major cities, though their degree of involvement in local 'white' politics varies greatly. Frequently they restrict themselves to participation in the Community Relations Councils, and in some cases their other energies seem to be more directed to gaining control of the local Sikh Temple than to changing the position of Indians in white society. But there is no doubt that the IWA's have the potential to be, and in some towns already are, major political forces. The question is whether or not the young Indians who were active in the anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles of the summer of 1976 will bother to force the IWA's to take a more active interest in British politics. The Southall Youth Movement, for instance, was highly critical of the IWA leaders, and there may be a need for a new organisation to be formed to represent their needs.

The Bangladeshi Workers Association is also split. The pro-Chinese faction has been militant, but the other is openly reformist. Since a large proportion of Bengalis in Britain are from peasant backgrounds, their position is quite different from that of, say, the Sikhs, and their organisation faces bigger problems. On the other hand, they

are less easily tied into the race relations machine, and their combativity is high - as has been seen in the self defence activities and the struggle of the Bengali Housing Action Group in Tower Hamlets, London.

It is increasingly obvious that the existing Asian organisations do not have the resources and politics required to meet the needs of Asian workers, and new structures have had to be created. The strikes of Asian workers in the Midlands in 1974 were not effectively assisted by the Asian organisations, at least at a national level, and only the Race Today Collective made any substantial contribution, mainly in the form of publicity and analysis. At Imperial Typewriters, the important point was the self-activity of the strikers, and it was their discipline and organisation which sustained the strike for so long. The fact that they were defeated by the fatal combination of a washed out trade union (with the help of a dose of National Front poison) and an American multi-national, simply strengthens the argument for a strong, national, working class Asian organisation.

The formation of the Asian Socialist League, as a result of the activities of Asian members of the International Marxist Group in the Socialist Unity campaign in Stetchford, Birmingham (March 1977) is a clear recognition of the inadequacies of the existing Asian groups. The ASL has not made a national impact, however, and it may be some time before it can.

The absence of a national Asian organisation capable and willing to develop working class solidarity has been worryingly obvious at the continuing struggle at the Grunwick factory in North London. During all these months, no organisation has been able to develop support in the Asian community for the strikers at Grunwick. The political inexperience of the strikers has made them easy prey for the machinations of their union, APEX, and the almost exclusive reliance on the 'labour movement' by the Trades Council activists, has meant that the politics of Grunwick have never reached Asian workers directly. Yet the mobilisation of the black community would have been at least, if not more, upsetting for the ruling class as the mass pickets have been.

We can expect many more strikes involving Asian workers. The extensive solidarity offered by their own community means they cannot be starved into submission as easily as whites, and their lack of reliance on the trade union movement ("honey on the elbow" as Ms Desai put it) makes for greater intensity of struggle. This will make it all the more essential for Asian political organisations to develop which is capable of building these strikes between the communities. Equally essential is the political understanding and support of white organisations which can work with such black groups without compromising their autonomy, so that solidarity can be generated in the white working class.

West Indians

Like the Asians, West Indians brought with them to Britain considerable political experience, gained in the trade union movements which were at the front of the independence struggles. But it is probably true to say that West Indian culture is less cohesive than that of the various Asian groups in Britain. So we find more local black organisations than national ones. In each town where West Indians have settled, there will be organisations for people of each island, whose main role will be cultural, but which will take political action under some circumstances.

Since such groups tend to represent the more 'respectable' West Indians, informal organisation around the clubs and sound systems has been developed by other West Indians. The political power of such organisation should

not be underestimated - the clubs were the source of the black resistance to the attacks in Notting Hill in 1958, and the sound systems were the nucleus of the youth who rebelled at Carnival (Notting Hill, 1 and August 1977) and Chapeltown (Leeds, November 1976). - Each town also has its own overtly political groups, organised round community centres, newspapers or whatever, and these are the groups which will mount campaigns on issues like police harassment, bad schooling etc.

Most white leftists will say that these groupings are too local, lacking national cohesion and that they do not advance what we call revolutionary politics. This is the sort of arrogance black militants have come to expect from us. The fact is that most of these groups do have contacts between cities, and these contacts are used when necessary. The important point is that these groups have their priorities right - they are attempting to build from the base upwards, to establish real roots in the communities where they live. As to their 'lack of revolutionary politics', we should note, for a start, that the Croydon and Brixton Collective, in particular, has a theory and practise which is consistently revolutionary, as does the Race Today Collective, if of a rather more polemical sort. The other point, however, is that what the white left defines as revolutionary politics is often far removed from the needs of black communities (and, often, of white communities too). For instance, the white left only recognises the politics of, say, a mobilisation against a racist headmaster in a deliberately under-resourced school insofar as it provides an opportunity to make contact with a few black militants. They do not see the struggle itself as 'political' (they hope that they can operate on the misconceived principle of injecting the correct politics from outside), because they fail to recognise that, in such struggles, the community is confronting the state, via its local agents in the council, and raising the political consciousness of large numbers of people.

Similarly, the question of the political content of the mobilisations in support of black youth who are up against the law is often raised by our blinkered comrades. Our position is that such organisation is political, because it starts from the real needs of the masses, it confronts the state, and it raises consciousness. The fact that it does not raise the Transitional Demands causes us no loss of sleep.

This is not to say that all is rosy in West Indian politics. But the problems are being dealt with. There is a crying need for the political coherence, which stems from theory, to unify the content of the struggles of West Indians. Too little attention is paid to the state's forward planning on race, in particular its strategic use of the Immigration and Race Relations laws. But Sivanandan's article 'Race, Class and the State' deals with these issues very usefully, and Race Today, Black Liberator and Front Lines (Croydon and Brixton Collective) all take up the effects of the state's strategy, the role of Community Relations officials, the attempted cooling out of black youth etc.

There are also signs that the parochialism of the various islanders is being broken down. Even though the groups with names like 'United Caribbean Committee' are often dominated by people from one island, the fact that they exist shows the awareness among West Indians of the need to end the rivalry between islands. In London, where West Indians are thrust together in bigger workplaces and larger communities, consciousness of island is far less than in, say, Leeds, where the majority come from one small island which itself has seen little industrial development.

Another problem being dealt with is the conflict between racial nationalism and class politics. The (white) left continually confuses 'separatism' with 'autonomy'. While the influence of the autonomous groups is growing, that of the separatist, black nationalist groups is declining. The major example of the latter is 'Grassroots' (Black Liberation Front) in Notting Hill. In the ideological battle being fought by, for example, the Croydon and Brixton Collective and Race Today against

this tendency, we clearly support CBC and Race Today. Grassroots has even gone so far as to print an article by Rudy Narayan, the black barrister with parliamentary ambitions, in which he suggests that the problem with law centres is that they are run by Jews. On other occasions the man has attacked law centres because they are run by revolutionaries.

While the autonomous groups share with Grassroots the belief that the emancipation of blacks must start with their own organisations, there the similarity stops. Separatists believe that race is the crucial factor, and that the overthrow of capitalism is, at best, secondary. Militant separatists will engage in adventures like the Spaghetti House siege, but many of them will simply polemicise against the evils of the white race while making money alongside white capitalists. The importance of this ideology can be seen when it is employed by the emerging middle class black leaders, who use a spurious nationalism as part of their battle against the influence of socialist ideology - which they conventionally label as 'white'.

The autonomous groups, on the other hand see the prime importance of the overthrow of capitalism, the need for unity, on their own terms, with the white working class, and the need to defeat the middle class 'leaders' in their own community. For them, the issues of race and class are intertwined. Most of them accept the need for a revolutionary party to destroy capitalism, but have little faith in the ability of the existing revolutionary leaderships to either provide a sound basis for unity, or to ensure the rights of black people in a post-revolutionary society.

The need for this marxist tendency to grow inside the West Indian community is crucial for the development of revolutionary politics in Britain. But there is no way that it can be forced by the 'interventions' of white groups. There are several battles for these militants to fight within their own communities: against the middle class leaders in the various island groups and the Commission for Racial Equality, and against the black nationalists. Whites can be of little use in these struggles.

Nor can we help much in the important tasks facing the class/race tendency: the building of its influence among youth, and among working class parents. They are in a special position due to their partial education and socialisation in this country, which has raised their expectations and increased their frustration, and has developed their conflict with the standards of their parents. Add to this their high incidence of unemployment and police harassment and their effective development of an oppositional culture based in Reggae, Dub, and Rastafarianism, and you can see how ineffective white socialists are bound to be among black youth. In fact, militant nationalists are likely to be more effective than us, and even the autonomous groups are sorely tested in their efforts to develop the anti-capitalist content of the struggles of black youth. But these struggles will grow, as unemployment and police and fascist harassment grows. The autonomous groups, both national and local, will have to show that their political organisation can take the pressure, and meet the needs of the youth. This is where solidarity actions with the youth who have been captured by the police and the courts are of enormous political importance.

The working class black parents are in a different position. While they are now fully aware that they were duped by the vision of the mother country held out to them in the colonial schools at home, they find it difficult to identify with the extreme opposition of their children. They have been shocked out of their faith in British justice, but it is still a big step for them to adopt a revolutionary stance against the state. The autonomous groups which are developing political practice around black workplaces and around schooling (eg the Black Parents Movement) and the law, are clearly going in the right direction.

THE ROLE OF THE WHITE LEFT

Further proof that the white left can only proceed on the basis of support for the autonomy of blacks can be gained from a glance at the fate of the black sections of the SWP and IMG. The SWP took the only step its politics would allow in founding the paper 'Flame'. Any hint of autonomy contained in the initial masthead "I.S. paper of black workers in struggle" has now been removed by the new tag "Black workers paper of the SWP", a subtle but significant change made possible, no doubt, by the resignation of a large number of the black members who started the paper. They objected to the demand that the editorial board should contain white members of the leadership of the SWP, and that the paper should mirror the SWP's campaigns. This group subsequently founded 'Samaj', which spoke directly to Asian and West Indian workers, but they have been unable to establish a national organisation, and are now considering merger with the Croydon and Brixton Collective. The black people who have remained within the SWP appear to be quite committed to its sectarian and economisitic approach, and show no signs of making real connections with the black working class, though a recent article by Tony Bagues (International Socialism No) plunders Race Today to argue for involvement in the anti-courts struggles of black youth. A change of line that could quite easily become another 'recruit and run' exercise.

The IMG has always had a more principled position on the question of autonomy, and its ability to put politics before party building has meant that it can attract some black people to its ranks particularly, though not exclusively, those who have been to college. Its recent initiative in launching the Asian Socialist League is a welcome step towards support for black autonomy, and represents a move away from their previous position of support only for black caucuses within trade unions and organisations. But the inability of black IMG members to sustain their over-intellectual journal 'Black Struggle' shows the difficulties they face. Relying heavily on a few black intellectuals to write the journal, and then relying on white members to sell it, the journal could never make much impression on the black working class.

None of this is to argue that there should not be black members in white revolutionary organisations. There may well be black people who have serious political differences with the black autonomous groups, or who live in areas where there are no such groups, or even those whose political and cultural background makes them closer to white revolutionaries than black. Another factor to be considered is the position of half castes. Often rejected by both blacks and whites, the conflicts which exist in half castes make most of them identify primarily with the blacks, but some may feel more akin to whites, and therefore may join the (white) organisations.

For whatever reason they join, black people in the (white) groups play an essential part in educating white revolutionaries and in developing the political line of the group. For these reasons we welcome blacks in Big Flame. But we would argue that the prime role of any black members would normally be, wherever possible, to contribute to the growth of the autonomous revolutionary tendency in the black working class. Black members would also ensure that the question of race is not peripheral to the group's politics - a separate area of work with its own slogans and methods - but is and integral part of all the group's political activity.

Given the pre-eminence of the need for autonomous black organisation, what should be the role of the mainly white organisation? The first thing is for us to understand the implications of our 'unconditional support'. This means that we never conduct ourselves in such a way which interferes with their right to conduct their own affairs. We must never parachute into an area of black struggle and conduct our

own propaganda and activity. If we happen to have an existing base in the area, and are therefore in a legitimate position to contribute to that struggle, we accept the leadership of the autonomous group. Where there is no such group, we should design our activity to encourage the emergence of a militant black leadership - not to recruit the emerging leaders to our own group. This does not mean that we are mindless camp followers of whatever black leaders there are. We may well have political disagreements, and if we have earned the right to argue through our political work in the area, then we can and should engage in debate. But not in the kind of steamrollering perfected by some groups - the 'debate' that is designed to destroy an organisation. We may also be in a position to contribute to the struggle via our contacts in other cities, or financially, or by helping organise speakers, or by lending equipment or resources. But again, too often such help is of the kind offered by imperialists to the Third World - the kind that demands a greater return some time in the future, or which is simply an attempt to manipulate the group's activity.

The second thing we have to understand is that political activity around race is not to be equated with 'interventions' among black people. The white left has a number of important tasks to perform in relation to the white working class, the fascist organisations, and the state. All these tasks are related to the question of race, but in attempting to carry them out, we do not compromise our solidarity with the autonomous groups, nor do we spend all our time diving into 'black struggles'.

What sometimes looks like an obsession by (white) groups to recruit black people seems to have clouded our understanding of the politics of race. It has removed attention from the long term strategy of the social democrats. Following Sivanandan, we argue that the state's policy is 'give a little, take the lot'. Requiring immigrants (black and white) to do the shitwork, the govt has to deal with the revolt being engineered inside the black working class, particularly that of the black youth. We would add that it also has to deal with the racist revolt among its own supporters. The strategy appears to be to both impress the racists in the working class and depress the immigrants by slowly removing their rights and citizens and replacing them with the non-rights of migrants. The hardship caused by Immigration Laws cannot be over-estimated. Misery and fear, neither of which are conducive to revolt when you are in a small minority, result from the enforced separation of families (which itself increases illegal immigration, with all the ensuing problems), the random police raids, and the requirement of reporting at police stations. The ultimate step is to make immigrants in this country have the same status as the non-EEC migrants in Germany and France: living without their families in barracks, to be sent home whenever they have served their economic purpose. All of this, of course, swells the shriveled heart of the racist, and maybe brings a vote back to Labour from the National Front.

But it does not deal with the revolt of the black youth, particularly the West Indians, who are born here. To them, the state appears to 'give', in the form of Race Relations laws to curb the unacceptable face of racism (job discrimination, incitement etc), and cash grants to projects which will get the revolting black youth off the streets and into hostels, playgrounds, job sampling schemes, crash half-skill courses or whatever. The added advantage, from the state's point of view, of these schemes is that they also provide jobs for some of the black people whom they hope will form a middle class able to contain the youth. While the Commission for Racial Equality (and its predecessors) is in the frontline of this operation, the other schemes like Manpower Services and those being funded under the Holland Report should not be forgotten.

We do not argue that these schemes should be thrown back in the face of the ruling class. They might make life better for some of the youth, at least in the short term, and some may even use the schemes for their own political advantage. What is needed is a concerted anti-racist campaign

by the whole of the left. The basic slogan must be the one already adopted by some groups: "Abolition of all Immigration Laws", but we have to find a more effective way of mounting this campaign than simply writing to trade union branches and asking them to pass a resolution. We have to use phone-ins, letters to the press, direct action, and, above all, consistent political work in our communities and workplaces to make people see that the presence of black people has nothing to do with the economic and social problems we face. The latter argument, of course, is inseparable from our general political work of winning the mass of people to socialism, and ties in with the kind of work which is relevant to the support of the black youth - explaining to the white working class why black youth are rebelling, how the short term job creation schemes can be of no lasting use, and advancing policies which will make a difference. Since many white youth share the problem of shitwork or unemployment, plus a measure of police harassment, with blacks, many of these arguments will find a resonance in white parents.

The third area of work for the (white) left is in the opposition to fascism. We take neither of the extreme views about fascism current on the left: that fascism can be reduced to racism, and that we fight racism by building a broad alliance with all people of good-will; or that fascism alone is the major threat, and it can only be dealt with by physical force. We argue that fascism is not on the cards in Britain today, since it is not useful to the state, which is already well armed with a repressive apparatus in the form of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Criminal Justice Law, the Immigration Law of 1971, the army which is trained in strike breaking, and an effective secret police force. But the fascist organisations are not the puppets of the ruling class, and have sufficient autonomy and skill to grow. While some sections of the ruling class may oppose them, others may well tolerate them as an anti-left force of some usefulness. Racism is the well-spring of fascism, and it has such a powerfully decisive force in the working class among those who are not, and are never likely to be, fascists, that we must emphasise the need for a vigorous anti-racist campaign on the lines mentioned above. But the fascists have a programme and a method which goes beyond racism. Ultimately based on the anti-semitic opposition to 'finance capital', the fascists purport to offer a complete political programme to solve all problems. While there is no doubt that we have to stop the fascists organising, using, if necessary, physical force, we also have to counter the whole programme of the fascists, by defeating them politically inside the working class and demonstrating the viability of the socialist alternative.

For the left to have any real effect in the fight against racism and fascism, it requires a powerful, autonomous black movement. This article started with a theoretical argument about the need for an autonomous black movement before there could be a real revolutionary party. It ends with a practical argument for this powerful, autonomous movement: without it, the (white) left will be in danger of being swamped by the racists and the fascists.

Fred Red
10.2.78

Scources

- A. Sivanandan 'Race, Class and the State' - a Race & Class pamphlet (1977)
- 'Towards a new Revolutionary Socialist Organisation' - Big Flame 1977
- Tony Bogue's article in International Socialism (about No. 102)
- The collected editions of Race Today magazine, at least since 1974
- The Left against racism and fascism - JH (SLBF)
- Frontlines - the paper of the Croydon and Brixton Collective
- Articles on fascism and the strong state - Big Flame Internal Bulletins 21-23