

BIG FLAME



A CLOSE LOOK AT FASCISM AND RACISM 20p

Anti-Fascists: Don't Ignore Racism

AN INTERVIEW
WITH
A. SIVANANDAN

IN THE interview that follows, **A.Sivanandan** discusses Thatcher's recent statements on race and immigration in the context of the policies of the British government. Sivanandan is a black militant and author of **'RACE, CLASS AND THE STATE'**, which is a central text for understanding the relationship between the needs of the British economy and the changes in race relations and immigration policies.

BF: At one level the differences between the immigration policies of the Tories and Labour are small, to what do you attribute these differences?

Firstly, they are both capitalist parties, secondly they are not homogenous, so the parties cover a whole spectrum of policies on race and immigration. And thirdly these race policies change with changes in the system of making

profits through exploitation (the capitalist system). You see it is my belief that racism is not essential to the capitalist ideology. It is a tactic that the system uses in a particular period of its development - this is particularly clear in the colonialist period or in country like South Africa today where racism is an essential component of the system of exploitation. In the colonial period, they discriminated in order to exploit and they had both the political and economic power to do that. But once the colonies became politically free, such political control was no longer necessary since these countries were economically dependent on capitalist markets.

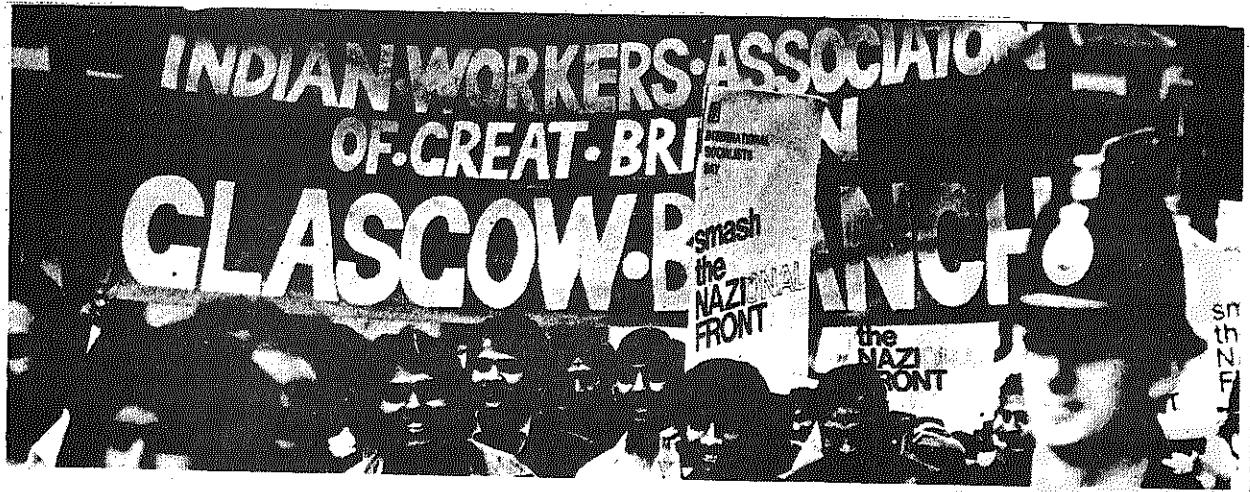
What is happening inside Britain copies this pattern - we have first domestic colonialism which then gives way to domestic neo-colonialism. As far as 'enlightened' capital goes - that is the multi-national corporations and international

capital - it is just a question of replacing one reserve army of labour with another: the black settler with the white 'guest-worker'. The political wing of this faction of capital is the Labour Party and the Heath section of the Tory party for whom racism is counter-productive. It is they who were responsible for what should be called the Contract Labour Act of 1971 (the Immigration Act). Once they established control of the Labour force and found an alternative in contract labour (which by the very nature of the contract has discrimination built into it). They found racism counter-productive. Though they did nothing about racialism (the racial divisions inside the working class) until the rise of the NF as an electoral force.

Thatcher and her supporters stand for old style, out-dated, free enterprise capitalism. They are full of contradictions which include the call for better race rela-



John Sturrock - Report



tions and more immigration control, though it is perfectly obvious that over the past 15 years when we have had more and more immigration controls which have in fact bought a worsening in race relations. And as people like Peter Walker have pointed out, one of her solutions to cut back immigration, that is to stop dependants coming in, is contradictory since the family fulfills an important social role — there will be much more social unrest if black people are not allowed to have families and 'settle down'. But whatever the contradictions, Thatcher has gone for the race issue because in a racist society racism gets votes.

BF: Anti-fascist forces are always comparing the NF to the German Nazis of the '30's, how valid do you think this comparison is?

Of course this is an enormous subject — I think we have not really

analysed fascism today, we are just extrapolating from the '30's situation. And so to a certain degree has the NF, it has borrowed a lot of ideology from the Nazis — there's no doubt about that. You see the fascism of the '30's came after a defeat of the working class but what we have today is a co-optation of the working class, the collaboration of working-class organisations with governments — in Britain through the social contract where the working class has lost its only power — collective bargaining, collective action. So then we must begin to talk about the corporate state, the authoritarian state.

BF: The difference in tactics of what you have called 'enlightened' capitalism of the Labour Party and the free-enterprise capitalism of Thatcher came out clearly over Grunwick.

Grunwick was a classic confrontation between the two. Enlightened capitalism's solution was to do away with

racism and to integrate black workers into the trade-union movement, and into the capitalist economy. A non-unionised black workforce spells danger for the system. You have a history of Asian strikes to show you this. At this stage, the black struggle threatens to bring politics into the working class movement. Blacks have had to deal with not just the standard of living but with the quality of life. And the working class struggle, as you and I know, has been reduced to an economic struggle, if only temporarily. At present, it's a struggle for wages not for power. So that the failure of the Grunwick strike up to date is a failure of the enlightened capitalists. It's a victory for Ward, the NAFF and Thatcher. Their victory means that black workers cannot be integrated into the system. The Government has managed to integrate the working class through its trade union organisation into the economic system — and yet these black workers remain "outside the damn thing."

Because of their historical position, firstly in their struggles against colonialism, now in their struggles as the most disadvantaged part of the working class, black people, though a very small minority, are a very dynamic and dangerous one for the system. And given the level of unemployment among black youth, they also present a very serious threat to the system. Grunwick is crucial. Grunwick is to the labour movement what inner cities are to British society. Because like Grunwick, the inner cities spell revolt, rebellion — threat to law and order.

BF: One of the key differences between the struggle of black people in this country and in the United States is the lack here of a perspective of positive discrimination (what the Americans call affirmative action) in favour of black people (and women). And when a few weeks ago Camden Council announced that it intended to practice positive discrimination, all the anger of



Funeral Demonstration for Attab Ali, murdered by racists (Andrew Wiard. Report)

the establishment fell on it and the Council had to hastily back-track.

This is a very important point. The key difference is that in the States there was a mass movement, a civil rights movement of black and white demanding positive discrimination — blacks demanding reparations from the church and so on. But there has been no such movement in this country ... we are only two million here and we can't do it by ourselves. What the left has done here is to play the game within the rules set out by the system, so no-one defends Camden's position. This country is a blotting paper society, expert at soaking up and negating

protest. So when Camden Council steps out of line, everyone falls on them including the so-called representatives of the black community. Mind you, given the current climate of public opinion Camden should have gone ahead and done what they wanted to do without talking about it. For years, local councils have been putting dots against black people in housing, social services, education what about a few dots for black people on the housing lists, on the school lists, on the employment lists?

BF: What strategy do you think there should be to incorporate anti-racism with the anti-fascist struggle?



ANDREW WIARD (Report)

The failure of anti-fascist organisations up to date, and this comes across very clearly in their failure to have dealt with Thatcher in any real sense, has been that they have not been anti-racist. They have only been anti-racist by implication, they have not tackled racism per se. (In the areas where these organisations exist they have not addressed themselves to the needs and problems of black people. Of course there are exceptions like the Harringay Labour Movement Campaign which took up the cause of a black prisoner, Tony Anderson and the group in Shepherd's Bush that went out painting over fascist slogans. You see we black people know that racism is the first manifestation of fascism — we've been telling you this for a long time. Even now when the signs are clear, anti-fascist organisations continue to work at an ideological level and from 'the top down', as opposed to the organisational level which is at the grass-roots. This is my criticism of the Anti-Nazi League — it's an organisation working from the top downwards. I am critical of all anti-fascist organisations that are essentially counter-demonstrators who react to the NF.

Any activity has to be around those people who are being oppressed on a racial basis and that is the black people. That is where the NF recruits, with attacks on black people. And this must take place at the grass roots. In any case, Thatcher's recent outburst makes it the case that you can no longer ignore racism as a dimension of fascism; you'll have to tackle racism if you are going to tackle Thatcher. And if the anti-fascist committees take up this grass-roots activity, they will force the Labour Party to take a more active position on race since they are part of these committees, at least the rank and file are. And hopefully, this would encourage large numbers of black people to join the anti-fascist organisations which they have not done up till now. The situation of fascist attacks on black people is a situation which calls for alliances — black people could do with numbers in their struggle against the fascists and it affects white and black people alike. It is in this area that the white left has failed to move in and support as opposed to move in and try and take over.

The fight against fascism is a fight that is common to both of us, we come at it from two different directions, two different perspectives. We are the immediate victims. If they come for us in the morning, they will come for you that night. So be with us that morning and we will be with you that night.....

'I don't
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SOUTH LONDON BLACK YOUTH SPEAKS

Q. Is the black community responding in any way to the growth of the National Front?

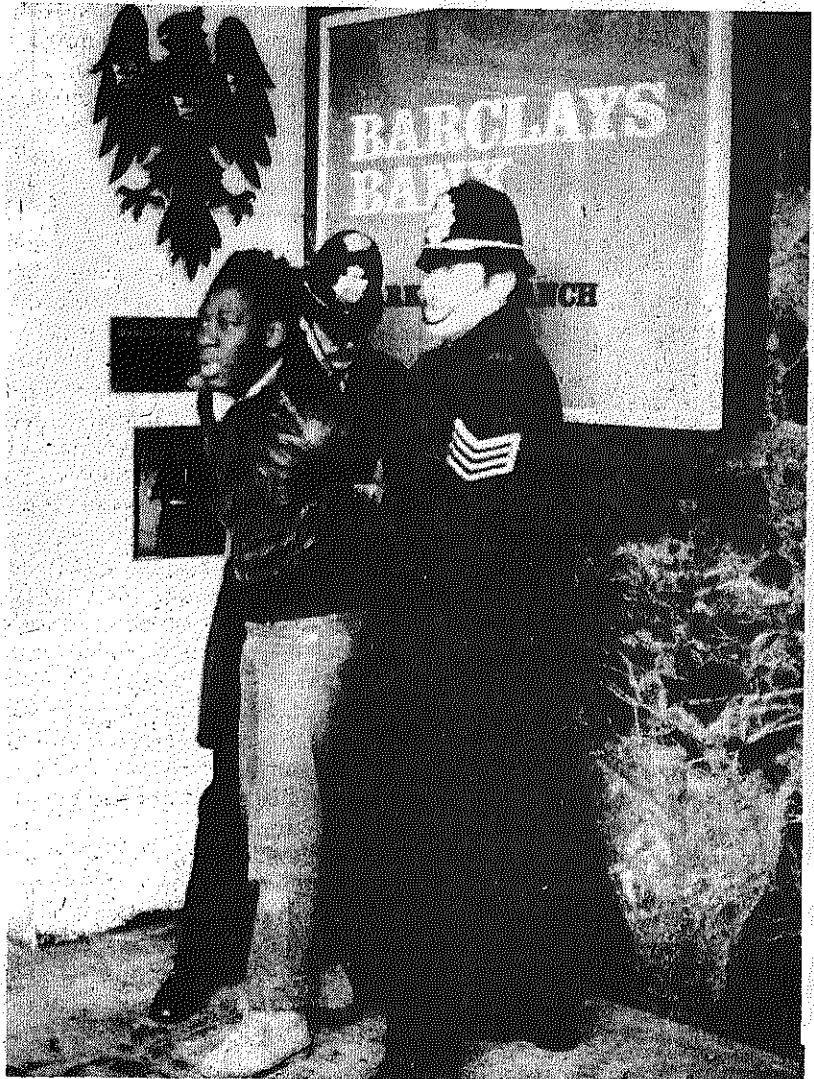
A. The majority of black people now are starting to become politically involved, but only because of the growth of the National Front. The majority of black people, although they moan about the political workings of this country, are satisfied with their lives, I mean up to a point. Or rather they were because now they've got to make a stand or back down. Either everybody packs their bags and goes back home to Jamaica or wherever, or they're going to stand up and make a fight for what they've got in this country, however little it is.

How has the Lewisham Demonstration affected this situation?

A. As far as I can see, Lewisham affects it in a sense that with some white people, black people have a closer relationship. In the crowd there were a lot of militant blacks and there was a lot of your lot (whites)

there. They was all joining together. A lot of the sort of things you was hearing said from black people in the crowd, such as "Look at those white guys up there, those guys are bad" Some of the white guys were doing things worse than the black guys and the black guys were just standin' there in amazement. "They're bad man and they with us."

At first they was amazed and afterwards they was pleased. There was a very friendly feeling. At times I saw guys sitting on walls — a really militant black guy sittin' chattin' with a white guy which normally he'd never do. In the crowd they were drawn together. The feeling amongst the blacks afterwards was "well there's as many white people as there are black" And in that respect I think they felt a bit more secure than they had done before. The whites who were fighting were not necessarily fighting for black people but were fighting with





them. The blacks weren't on their own. They don't feel so left out. I think before the black population felt they were fighting the whole of the white population apart from a few social workers. But in the actual demonstration the whole lot was drawn together and they saw the white people was concerned and I think they felt a bit more at ease.

I don't know whether it improved the relationship of white people towards black people, but it certainly improved the relationship of black people towards whites. In Lewisham younger kids are coming together. Tolerance has grown. Friendships, between black kids and white-kids have grown. We don't hear much of black kids and white kids fighting one another in Lewisham. In the '60's you used to get a very different situation. In the skin-head era, black kids and white kids used to have big fights. Apart from the odd incident there's not much of that anymore. Organised gangs aren't a feature of the scene.

What did you think of the police on the Demonstration?
Really I don't like the police. As far as I can see their main purpose in life seems to be to harass people.

Like the Lewisham 24 - (24 black youths arrested on completely cooked up charges)
Yes. One of my friend's friends was picked up around the same time as the Lewisham 24. They didn't make any charge just asked him a lot of questions and kept him locked up in a cell for two days, not allowed to see anybody. And then they just let him go again. But on the demonstration the police's behaviour was odd. For a long time most of the police arrests were towards white people. There was a black guy walked past a police-

man with a brick in his hand and five others carrying a great pole down Lewisham way, and in both cases the 'old Bill' just sat there! It almost seemed as if they didn't want to pick out too many black people. They were goin' out of their way to collect more white people than black people. I don't know whether they were ordered to or not but it really seemed as if before they'd come out someone had said - lets take it easy on the black kids cos we don't want too much publicity.

After the Front disappeared and the police tried to clear the streets, this situation changed. After the police station was stoned and the bike set on fire, the police lost

their cool. And by then it was the black youth who were really in the middle of it and they started getting arrested.

It seems as if these developments are confined to youth, how do the older blacks feel about the violence?
The older people are very conservative and a lot of them didn't agree. In neighbouring streets down by Ladywell a lot of black people were looking out of their windows and sayin' "terrible business! terrible business!" But then again a lot of older people did agree with it. "Cos a lot of them don't like white people anyway. They were saying - great, beat 'em up. One old man was saying "the only way to get 'em is to get a knife and stab 'em."

"SUS"PICION

THE CHARGE of 'sus' - that is 'being a suspected person' was introduced with the Vagrancy Act of 1834. It was introduced by Parliament as one method of controlling the large number of unemployed who were wandering the country in desperate search for work, caught in the depression following the Napoleonic wars. Now, once again unemployment rates are high and 'sus' is a favourite tool of racist police against black youth. For the police 'sus' is a wonderful charge - the prosecution doesn't have to produce a victim, the accused isn't informed of the charge until arrival in court and there is no right to trial by jury.

In 1975, the last year when full figures are available, more than 3,000 people were arrested on 'sus'. Of these almost half were in Lon-

don, and more than half of these were black. Who is 'guilty' of 'sus' - well, according to the Vagrancy Act 'Every suspected person or reputed thief, frequenting any river, canal, or navigable stream, dock or basin, or any quay, wharf or warehouse ... street, highway ... avenue ... with intent to commit an arrestable offence'. So easy is it for the police to convince judges that the accused had 'an intent to commit an arrestable offence' that Justice Scarman recently attacked the police for using 'sus' as 'a convenient method of supplying a hiatus in the evidence of a felony' (which means using 'sus' when there is no hard evidence for committing the crime). A law similar to 'sus' was ruled unconstitutional in the US, luckily for our rulers this country does not have a written constitution!

Why I was a racist

Recently a leading member of the NF in Leeds stopped being a racist when his Asian workmates supported his fight against sacking. In this article, an anti-fascist militant writes about his childhood in Wolverhampton and the reasons he supported the racist ideas of Powell.

WHEN ENOCH Powell made his 'Rivers of blood' speech in 1968, he took over in the minds of the people of Wolverhampton, from where Stan Cullis had left off — he put the place back on the map.

Wolverhampton is an important centre for car foundries and engineering, but lacks a strong socialist tradition. The workshops and small factories of the past, when the boss worked on the same bench as the workers, blurred class distinctions so that the Tories had a lot of working class support, including my family.

During the fifties and sixties, in response to massive advertising from, among others, Enoch Powell, as Minister of Health, there was a steady influx into Wolverhampton of poor people from the shanty towns of the West Indies and the villages of Northern India. Because of the low wages they got, they automatically gravitated to the worst housing, in places like Whitmore Reans, Snow Hill and Bricklin Street, where my gran lived. Houses were hard to come by anyway, and a lot of the landlords were real Rachmans, who took advantage to charge exorbitant rents and avoid doing repairs. So a lot of immigrants clubbed together to buy a house, and found it hard to refuse when their mates came round looking for a place to live. That's why the overcrowding occurred.

Wolverhampton was all most people knew — in places like Bricklin Street the same families had lived next door for generations, and life revolved around the boozers and corner shops. Now the corner shops were being taken over by immigrants and, as the whites who could moved out to the new council estates, the new neighbours didn't even speak English, let alone Wulvrnian, and played 'strange' music which came through the thin walls at all hours.

Apart from football, tenpin bowling and Monday night dances at the Civic Hall, Wolverhampton, like most other places, didn't have much for young people. You had to wear trousers and short hair to get into the clubs, so you got gangs of lads with lots of energy and nothing to do roaming round the town at night, with the predictable results. The West Indian lads were respected because of the music, and their 'aggro', especially one gang called the 'In Crowd' but the Asian kids were too different to understand, and so got rejected. All that has

changed a lot since, especially when I saw the Asian kids go into action against the NF kids at Winson Green last year, and there are a lot of multi-racial gangs in Wolverhampton now.

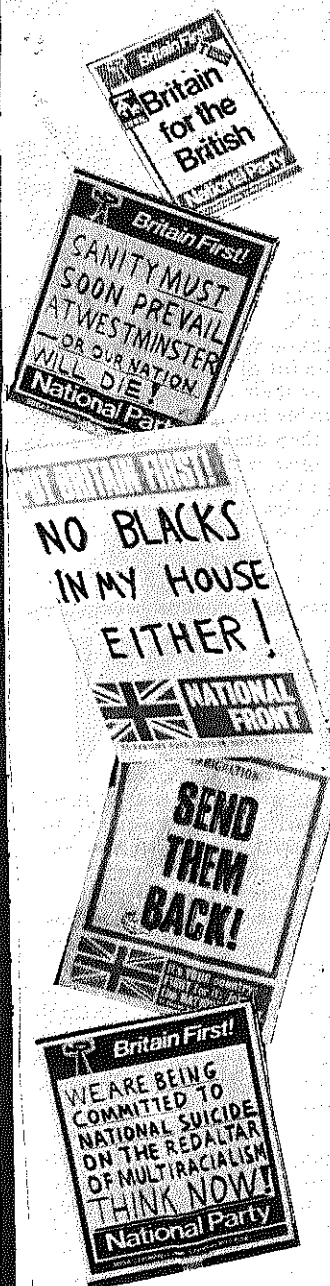
I went to a Grammar School, where I was constantly put down by the teachers for my accent and made to feel ashamed of being working class, but by seventeen I was confident enough to identify with my background against the school. Just like lots of lads and girls, racism was attractive to me, in that it meant you could rebel against the system with the implicit support of your family. Plus let's face it, it's a lot easier to be a racist when there are no blacks to face, which is one reason why Powellism is still strongest on the all-white Council estates like the one where I lived.

But the real clincher for why I became a firm Powellite was the reaction of the middle class, whose abstract, liberal tolerance was totally irrelevant, ill-informed and patronising. "They don't have to live next door to them" was the racist response. I remember vividly a TV discussion following on a documentary about racism in Wolverhampton in which a middle-class do-gooder from Hampstead said "To be terribly frank, one finds the speech of the white people in Wolverhampton quite as alien as that of the ethnic minority"

And so racism and class-hatred became intertwined. I spoke in a debate on immigration at school in favour of Powell, totally unmoved by the 'classless' argument that racism is "nasty and unChristian". I still get the creeps when I hear that "One race, the human race" line, because it allows the NF to manipulate the germ of class consciousness in a racist direction. That's why they try to nail the revolutionary left as 'nigger lovers', students and 'do-gooders'.

Racism in the late '60s was primarily an emotional response to changes which were happening too quickly to comprehend without a socialist understanding.

It is only through developing ways of organising and struggling against what Capitalism does to our lives which can bring concrete victories in the here and now — in building the reality of working class power — that we will break down racism. Because racism is an expression of fear and powerlessness as much as anything else. Had the left been able to translate the abstract slogan of 'black and white, unite and fight' into a real struggle for adequate housing, decent class sizes, the racists would never have been able to make play with their fake concern for white workers. It is all the more urgent that we are able to do so this time round.



NF ECONOMIC POLICY: NATIONALISM IN DISGUISE

Chris Davies (Report)



IN ONE RESPECT, the National Front is on the run. It was humiliated in the May elections, and the tremendous growth of the anti-fascist movement spearheaded by the Anti-Nazi League is a daily slap in the face to the fascists. But these developments by no means spell death for fascism. The National Front has deliberately adopted – though it will never admit as much in public – a dramatic escalation of its policy of violence. For some time now it has been more open about its basic fascist creed, with its monthly magazine attempting to rehabilitate Hitler and taking clear anti-semitic stands.

The NF's present strategy is to harden its fascist cadre to 'educate' them in fascist ideology, and to test them in physical combat. The present spate of violence is not just the wild thrashings of an angry, dying animal, but a deliberate policy. This policy is made more urgent for the NF by another important development on the far right – the rapid increase in numbers of the openly-Nazi British Movement. Many NF activists, disconcerted at the failure of the 'respectable' electoral strategy of the NF, are joining the British Movement, which has always condemned Tyndall's 'weak' policies and have never made any bones about their full fascist programme and methods.

Big Flame has never taken the view that fascism can be characterised as rats who have to be kicked back down the sewer. While we are completely committed to the political position of 'no platform for fascists', a position which we feel should be physically implemented wherever it is tactically possible, we believe that the anti-fascist militants must have a clear understanding of the nature of modern fascism. The fascist ideology builds on many elements of bourgeois thought, and militants must be equipped to argue and organise against any fascist tendencies amongst elements of the working class.

NATIONALISM MASQUERADING AS ECONOMICS

"Q. What would you describe as the central moving spirit behind your economic doctrines?"

Tyndall: Our economic doctrines stem from the fact that we are basically a nationalist movement.
(*'The Economy, 15 questions answered'*, John Tyndall)

For the National Front, like any other political movement, economic policies cannot be separated from its general political ideology. Whereas the Tory and Labour parties pretend that their economic policies stem from some timeless application of the 'science' of economics, the NF at least has the merit of making clear that economic policies rest on a particular way of understanding society. Because it looks at the whole of the organisation of society, and acknowledges that its economic policies require a complete upheaval in society, the NF can claim to be a party of radical change and make fundamental attacks on the Tories and socialists alike.

It is this 'radicalism' and critique of Tory economics which has led the National Association for Freedom to describe the NF as 'socialist'. The split from the NF of the National Party was widely understood as the departure of the 'socialist' faction, comparable to the split in Hitler's National Socialist Party of the Strasser faction. This strange alliance of 'socialism' and nationalism has long been a source of confusion in

the left's analysis of fascism, and a close look at the NF's economic policies should help clear our minds.

NF ECONOMIC POLICIES

Several of the NF's economic policies read like some of the policies of the Labour Party, the Tribune Group or the Communist Party. The NF calls for import controls, directed investment, control of and possible nationalisation of the banking system, state intervention in industry, particularly in regional underdevelopment, withdrawal from the Common Market, a national fuel policy, rejection of the Tory counter inflation policy and of the Social Contract a concern for conservation and ecological balance, low price housing, workers participation, profit sharing and curbs on monopolies. It is very simple for NAFF to put NF policies alongside Labour's policies, and to quote from NF publications alongside those of the far left in its coverage of the 'socialist' press, as it does in its newspaper 'The Free Nation'. And many of these policies will look attractive to the 'average worker', particularly those who feel betrayed by Labour.

In its attack on the NF's economic policies, the left has concentrated exclusively on the precedent of Hitler's destruction of the trade unions, and on the occasional anti-union remark by NF leaders. This is a strong point, but at the moment the NF policy documents are very careful to hide their anti-union views — concentrating their attacks on 'militants', 'reds', 'wreckers' etc.

rather than attacking the unions as such — and they can quote some attitudes which seem favourable to workers in unions.

Nor can we rely on those NF policies which seem easily exposed as anti-working class in our efforts to discredit the fascists. The NF describes 'overmanning' as the 'national curse' and says the economy could be run with 5 million fewer workers. The threat involved in this policy is obvious, and little comfort can be taken from the statement that the NF would redirect the unemployed into new industries which would make the country self-sufficient in manufactured goods. All trade unionists know what the redirection of five million workers would mean.

The NF says it would restore the 'incentive to work' by cutting taxes, removing social security payments from strikers and by cutting social welfare, because 'it is used to debase the whole value of hard work and self-reliance'. (Shades of the slogan over the gateway of Auschwitz concentration camp — 'Work makes you free'). Attractive to some of the petit bourgeoisie, perhaps, but not to most manual workers whose main effort is to avoid hard work. Nor will many workers welcome the pledge to include 'loss sharing' in the NF's 'profit sharing' proposals, since this would obviously involve drastic wage and savings cuts if your firm went to the wall.

THE FASCIST PHILOSOPHY

It is useful to point out these obviously anti-working class elements



Carlos Augusto

National Front provoking ANL demonstration at Ilford