

# THE PAST AGAINST OUR FUTURE

## FIGHTING RACISM AND FASCISM



A BIG FLAME PAMPHLET

50p



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## Introduction

This pamphlet is the product of several years of collective activity by the Big Flame Anti-fascist/Anti-racist Commission. We have tried to break down the separation between 'thinkers' and 'doers', between theory and practice. The authors of this pamphlet have been active both locally and nationally in the struggle against racism and fascism in their trade unions, communities, anti-racist/anti-fascist committees, ANL committees and other organisations. This active involvement has enabled us to continually enrich our theory and understanding so that we can be clearer about how we go forward.

The struggle against racism and fascism has seen an enormous upsurge in recent years, many important events have happened and new forms of struggle have developed. Demonstrations such as Red Lion Square in 1974, the 4000 strong march in Blackburn in 1976, Lewisham in 1977, Leicester and Southall in 1979. The racist murders of Gurdip Singh Chaggar, Altab Ali, Michael Ferreira and many others as well as the tragic deaths at the hands of the police of Kevin Gately in 1974 and Blair Peach in 1979. The appearance of mass activity by the black community in response to racist and fascist attacks. The increase in state racism — tightening the immigration laws, increased use of 'sus', increased harassment of black people by the police. The attempt to build a democratic, national anti-fascist/anti-racist movement based on local committees and the birth of the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism with their mass involvement and massively successful carnivals. The appearance of the Gay Activists Alliance and Women Against Racism and Fascism and the consequent challenge to sexism within the anti-fascist/anti-racist movement.

We feel there is a need to analyse these developments, in order to learn from our successes and failures. The 1920s and 30s need to be re-examined to gain a clear understanding of the nature of fascism as a mass movement. Similarly a look at the history of British imperialism gives us a better understanding of the British racist state of to-day. We also need to recognise that we are not dealing with the capitalism of the 30s. There have been major changes and knowledge gained from the past is not a substitute for analysing the present crisis and current forms of racism and fascism.

Chapter One, *All our yesterdays*, looks at the fascist movements of the past in Italy, Germany and Britain. We feel there is a need to avoid using the term fascism loosely, to describe every form of authoritarianism as fascist, because we are then likely to make the wrong decisions about how to fight it politically. At the same time we try to show that fascism is not

an 'alien' philosophy, that its ideas are frequently more extreme examples of the sort of commonplace and 'common-sense' ideas that already exist in our society.

Chapter Two, *Roots*, examines the historical basis of the racism that exists in our society today. After a detailed examination of the development of imperialism, it attempts to explain the deep-seated racialism of the white working class, and outlines the racist immigration laws that have been introduced by successive British governments over the last two decades.

Chapter Three, *Up against the wall*, is an analysis of the crisis today. It examines the general move to the right in British society over the last few years: the attacks on liberal ideas in education, on unemployed 'scroungers', on women's rights, the development of 'scientific' racism and the calls for more law and order to counter black 'muggers'. Although the growth of the National Front and the British Movement are important events during this period we have not done the usual 'expose' on the Nazi background of their leaders. This is covered in many other books and pamphlets, some of which are mentioned in the bibliography. Therefore we have examined some of the more neglected aspects of fascist ideology including the attitudes towards women and sexuality. We also discuss the racism of the British state including the 'sus' and immigration laws in the context of the move towards a more authoritarian form of rule which has been described by some as the 'strong' state.

Chapter Four, *Fightback*, looks at the anti-racist/anti-fascist movement, at its successes and failures. We discuss the importance of international solidarity work, the impact of the women's and gay movements on anti-racist/anti-fascist struggle, the debate over the position of 'no platform for fascists' and the need to support an autonomous black movement. The history of the AR/AF movement is considered from the origins of the various local AR/AF committees, through the growth and decline of the ANL up to the present.

In this pamphlet we have tried to come to terms with the problems we have faced and some we have not faced in the recent past, as a basis for the discussion of where we go from here. We hope that it will not be just another 'nice read' to be put away on the shelf, but will provide a basis for the debate within the anti-racist/anti-fascist movement. There are many questions still to be resolved and we would never claim that this pamphlet contains 'the last word' on fascism and racism. But we do believe that many of the questions we raise have been frequently neglected in the movement and are vital for understanding and fighting racism and fascism.

# Ch 1. All Our Yesterdays

## Fascism from the 1920s to World War 2



### Fascism in Italy and Germany

In the introduction we pointed out the political importance of defining clearly and unambiguously what is meant by fascism. In Chapter one we intend to do this by looking at it historically. In particular we shall describe how fascism was able to take over the state in Germany and Italy in the 1930's and explain why it was less successful in Britain.

#### Fascism as a Mass Movement

Fascism has been called the revolt of the petty bourgeoisie. Obviously there is more to it than that, but it is true that all fascist movements to date have been based on this section of society. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries two historically new and powerful classes developed along with the establishment of large-scale industry – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The first owned the means of production; the second nothing except their ability to work, which they sold to the bourgeoisie to exploit for profit. This division of capitalist society is still with us today, despite our relatively higher standard of living.

There was, and still is, a third class: the petty bourgeoisie, who owned their own means of livelihood. In this class were small tradespeople, shopkeepers, handicraft workers and peasants. This class has for over a hundred years been gradually declining in numbers and power, because of its inefficiency in competition with production-line factories and large scale agriculture. In fact, the *Communist Manifesto*, written in 1848 by Karl Marx, predicted that they would sink into the proletariat and disappear as an independent section of modern society. They remained on the scene, however,

and by the end of the first world war had been joined by a new 'middle class' of engineers, designers, technicians, doctors, managers and so on. Although they had no economic independence, this new 'middle class' considered themselves superior to the working class.

In the years after 1918, the conditions of the petty bourgeoisie and new 'middle class' became worse. In Germany, they were crucified by the collapse of the German mark in the early twenties: tradespeople and small factory owners were bankrupted, while university professors and managers on fixed wages with no union to back them earned less than the workers in the factories. Normally politically reserved, their loss of privileges and social position drove them to extreme measures. Although opposed to big business, which was bankrupting them and forcing them to work for wages, they also hated the working class, who were able, through the strength of their organisations, to maintain their living standards to some extent. The ideology of the petit bourgeoisie was thus both anti-capitalist and anti-labour. More accurately, though, their anti-capitalism was nothing more than jealousy and frustration at failing to become capitalists themselves. For this they blamed finance capital which, through the credit system, they believed was responsible for inflation and bankruptcies.

They saw the solution as a 'classless' society, but not in the socialist sense of the word: they wanted a society based on class collaboration where there was a national interest over and above class interests. So they came to support National Socialism (the full name of the

Nazi party was the National Socialist German Workers Party, or NSDAP). By socialism they meant for the benefit of all, irrespective of class, not the abolition of classes. For them, industrial strife was not due to the opposing interests of conflicting classes, but was the result of communist 'agitators' and 'trouble-makers' who had to be removed. In practice, therefore, their movement was anti-working class; opposition to capitalism stayed at the level of propaganda.

The petty bourgeoisie were joined in the fascist movement by other sections of society. War veterans, especially the officers, were hard hit by unemployment, and looked back nostalgically to the comradeship of the trenches. They were ashamed of losing the war and blamed this on a so-called 'stab in the back' by the traitorous politicians who negotiated the Treaty of Versailles. University students, most of them from privileged backgrounds, had no chance of getting a job, but equally, nothing but contempt for the organised working class. Peasants' sons, forced off the land into the factories too recently to acquire working class consciousness, were also prominent in backing the fascists.

What this diverse group of people lacked, and because of their diversity could never have, was an organisation to represent their class interests. The bourgeoisie had their economic power, the workers the trade unions; they had nothing. Their diverse political interests prevented them agreeing on a political programme, on a rational set of ideas, explanations and arguments. And yet they shared a sense of deep resentment

against the Weimar Republic they lived in. And so they could only build a movement in which faith was substituted for reason, action for understanding, myths for analysis, and scapegoats for real enemies. They relied on symbols to weld them together, on large demonstrations with hundreds of flags, drums and marching bands to give them a feeling of belonging to something; to a movement capable by its magic of transforming their disappointment into hope, their powerlessness into strength. Within this movement there developed the specific form of organisation without which no fascist party can exist — the combat squad, the stormtroopers, a paramilitary organisation to give an outlet to their violent desperation, to give them the feeling, and the reality of power in the streets, a fist with which to smash the organised working class. In Germany this was called the *Sturmabteilung* (SA or Brownshirts), in Italy the *Fascisti*, or the Blackshirts, who took their name

from the Italian word for a bundle of sticks; like the workers they were powerless as individuals, together, they were strong.

### Fascism in Germany

The National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) was founded by Hitler in 1920, and grew rapidly during the economic crisis of the early twenties; by 1923 the SA, controlled by Hermann Goering, had 15,000 members in Bavaria alone. Hitler tried in vain to emulate Mussolini by organising a coup in Bavaria and marching on Berlin. This first attempt was a total failure, and Hitler was jailed, being released after nine months. From 1924 to 1929 the influence of the party declined in proportion as the economy stabilised and grew through the help of large American investment under the Dawes plan, but in 1929 the stock market in the USA collapsed and a new economic crisis shook the capitalist world. The Nazi party began to revive at a dramatic

rate as the voting figures in the national elections show:

1928	800,000
1930	6,000,000
1932	13,000,000

By 1932 it was the largest party in the Reichstag, the German parliament, and the SA was 300,000 strong. In January of 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor, the highest post in the government. Nevertheless, in order to change the constitution and obtain the dictatorial powers fascism needs, he required a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag. New elections were therefore called, in conditions very favourable to the Nazis — as the governing party, they had control of the press, but, more importantly, the SA gave them control of the streets: the Brownshirts were set loose in an orgy of violence to intimidate political opposition, during which 51 people died and hundreds were badly injured. Even then, the Nazis did not have the two-thirds majority, a problem which they solved by jailing all the communist party deputies and some of the social democrats. With the majority thereby assured, and the Brownshirts baying for blood outside, the Reichstag passed an Enabling Bill on March 23rd, giving Hitler the power he wanted.

The true anti-working class nature of fascism can be seen from the speed with which the Nazis destroyed the labour movement: the independent trade unions were abolished on May 2nd and the trade union offices and funds were taken over. The trade union leaders were arrested and thrown into what later became known as the concentration camps. On May 10th, the German Workers Front was set up; its leaders were appointed by the Nazis to collaborate with the bosses, the right to strike was abolished and industrial sabotage became punishable by death. On July 14th, the Nazi party was declared the only legal political party in Germany.

Over the next few years the German working class suffered terribly while big business, able to increase its exploitation, made huge profits. The unemployed were given jobs at rates of pay little higher than unemployment benefit and regular workers took a wage cut to pay for it. Fascism reached its logical extreme in the gas chambers of Belsen and Dachau where six million Jews died, together with countless numbers of Poles, communists, socialists, gays, gypsies and democrats.

### Fascism in Italy

As with most of Europe, the end of the first world war saw the outbreak of mass working class struggles in Italy. After the 1919 elections, in which the socialist party won the largest number of seats, the factories were occupied by half a million workers in 1920, and the peasants organised themselves into cooperatives and unions to obtain better conditions from the rich landowners. At the same time the first fascist squads were being organised by Mussolini.

Their first operations began in autumn of 1920 as the factory occupations were coming to an end. They operated initially in the countryside, and it was no



coincidence that their first target was the communes of Emilia, which still held economic power in their hands. Their appearance on the scene was a godsend to the capitalists and rich landowners, who were increasingly desperate in the face of the demands of the working class and peasantry.

Money and arms were therefore liberally provided to the fascists by the landowners and industrialists, and the police, army and courts came out in more or less open support for them. After destroying the peasant organisations, the fascists turned their attention to the cities and the industrial working class. On August 22nd they seized the town halls of Milan and Leghorn, which had socialist administrations; they burned newspaper offices in Milan and Genoa, and occupied the port of Genoa, the stronghold of the dockworkers' union. Bourgeois law and order turned a blind eye to all this, leaving the working class powerless to resist the final fascist takeover.

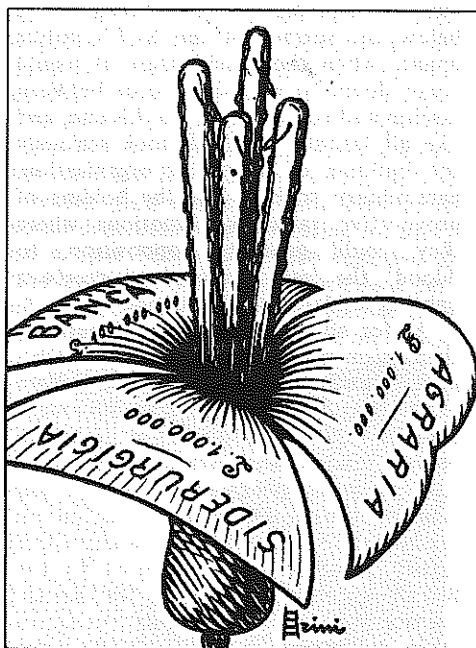
In October 1922, Mussolini organised the blackshirts' march on Rome, the government capitulated and Mussolini was installed as Prime Minister. He quickly introduced a new electoral law, designed to give the fascists a majority of seats in parliament, and the fascist combat squads were let loose again to intimidate political opposition during the 1924 elections. With a majority in parliament after these elections he gradually introduced new laws to break the working class organisations completely and eliminate political opposition. On October 1925, the bosses' organisation, the General Federation of Industry, granted the fascist unions the exclusive right to represent the workers, and in November the right to strike was abolished; the labour exchanges and labour organisations followed. In 1926, all political parties opposed to the regime were dissolved.

Capitalists now had the right to fix wages, and to cut them if they so wished. The result was a cut in real wages for the working class from 1927 to 1932 of over 50%. The unemployed were found jobs in public works at less than the rate for the job, which in turn brought down the wages of all other workers. As in Germany, the smashing of the independent organisations of the working class allowed capitalist profits to increase.

### Fascism and Big Business

And so, in Italy and Germany the results of the fascist takeover were clear — destruction of the organised working

class, and booming profits for big business. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to say that fascism was an unwitting tool of the capitalists. After all, large numbers of fascists had been recruited on the basis of opposition to big business. More importantly, the degree of organisation and party loyalty which was necessary to weld the fascist parties together gave their leaders an immense bargaining power, and a partial autonomy from the precise needs of capitalism. Fascism can be distinguished from regimes such as the Chilean Junta by the fact that it is an autonomous mass movement, not just a gang of generals who rely on a non-fascist police and military to carry out its rule.



*'The flower of Fascism' by Giuseppe Scalarini: the petals of big business, the banks, and agriculture reveal clubs — the violence of Fascism*

Even so, a fascist takeover would have been impossible without the financial and political backing of important sections of the bourgeoisie, so it becomes important to know what it was about the position of German and Italian capitalism which made it resort to fascism rather than stay with bourgeois democracy.

Italy after the war was a mainly agricultural country, not yet capitalised, but with a well developed labour movement. The problems of the bourgeoisie focussed on the twin needs for capital accumulation and an infrastructure on which to lay the basis of a competitive capitalist economy. In

concrete terms this meant electrification, the development of a car industry, an efficient transport system, mechanised agriculture and the means of increasing the exploitation of the workers.

In order to carry out this major restructuring of the Italian economy, the bourgeoisie needed to be in overall control. This had never been the case, and at the end of the war while the Italian bourgeoisie was economically weak and politically disorganised the working class was too strong to be exploited sufficiently to be forced to pay for the costs of the economic restructuring. This situation of extreme political crisis could only be resolved by extreme measures.

The bosses needed the fascists to destroy the organised working class; to create the conditions for capital accumulation they needed them as a strong state power to establish an infrastructure by dictatorial methods. The modern Italian motorway system is a monument to the extent to which that infrastructure was established, on the backs of sweated labour.

By contrast, Germany in 1929 was one of the most developed capitalist economies in the world and concessions granted to the working class ensured co-operation with the state by a significant section of the class. Nevertheless, there were sections of German capital, notably heavy industry, who faced a crisis of profitability because of the world economic crisis. They wanted a cut in their workers' wages and a market in which to sell their goods. Germany had no overseas empire — it had fought, and lost, the first World War for a 'Place in the Sun'. Further, the inability to maintain a strong government eventually led, through 'Article 48' to the Chancellor taking over from parliament. The Nazi party were clearly attractive for those looking for a strong government.

By destroying working class organisations the Nazis could force down wages, and by massive public spending, particularly on armaments, they could create the necessary market for the goods of heavy industry. This increase in public spending was inflationary, and was of course paid for by the working class through, for example, forced saving, the savings then to be 'lent' to the state for an indeterminate length of time.

## Fascism in Britain

In Britain the 'final solution' to the capitalist crisis was not fascism. Why the difference? The conventional explanation is that 'it couldn't happen here', as if to say that there is something essentially 'British' which prevents a fascist takeover. We reject this nonsense and look to the economic, political and social factors which explain the differences. Firstly the economic crisis was less

severe in Britain because to some extent it could be passed onto the colonies of the empire, which provided a source of cheap raw materials and a captive market. Secondly, the British bourgeoisie had learned, by extending the vote in a piecemeal and gradual way over a hundred year period, that universal suffrage and legal reformist parties could contain the growth of working class and revolutionary

organisations.

### The British Union of Fascists

The strong belief in parliamentary democracy was a barrier to the development of a mass fascist movement which is itself anti-democratic and anti-parliament. Nevertheless, during the 1930s there was a well organised, and at times threatening, fascist minority called the British Union of Fascists. The BUF





*Mosley's verbal attack*

was formed in 1932 by Oswald Mosley. At its height, the BUF had a membership, at most of 35,000, concentrated in a few specific areas — London, Manchester, Leeds and the south coast resort towns. It was never able to grow in areas where the labour movement and socialist tradition was strongest — Scotland, south Wales and the north east.

It was able to recruit the support of individuals from the establishment aristocracy and intelligentsia, and for a time the press baron Lord Rothermere and his *Daily Mail*, which constantly heaped praise on the Blackshirts and their policies. Even so, the fascists were never able to win the support of important sections of the ruling class, and in particular of big business. While it recruited some working class people, its turnover of new recruits was high, and workers were put off by the class composition of its leadership, which was mostly ex-army officers, aristocrats and gentry.

The BUF was founded with the publication of 'The Greater Britain', which emphasised a number of themes to attract support from possible sources of discontent. These themes (almost identical with those of the National Front today except for racism) were youth, nationalism, anti-communism, anti-

semitism and an attack on the political establishment, or the 'old gang' as they were called. Like the National Front later, the BUF was essentially opportunist and rapidly ditched policies when they failed to get support.

The BUF was at pains to project Mosley as the 'Leader' ('Führer' in German means leader) inspired by vision and powers denied to lesser mortals, fit to rule directly the destiny of the nation like a political superman. Accordingly, the BUF was a one man show, with Mosley making all the decisions, which were to be carried out loyally by the rest of the organisation. To attract support and create a sense of purpose for the membership, violence and 'action' were always just below the surface of the BUF's public image: when the 'crisis' came, it would come down to a trial of force between fascism and communism. To this end, and like all fascists, the BUF took seriously the building of a combat organisation, paramilitary training and the holding of provocative rallies in situations where they could guarantee opposition, to 'blood' the new recruits and create a fighting solidarity in the streets.

As for all fascist movements, national chauvinism was the bedrock of the BUF's policies and propaganda. In the Britain of the thirties national chauvinism meant absolute belief and support for the British Empire, and Mosley stressed this to the hilt. However, Germany had lost her empire after her defeat in the war and by the late 1930s her need for a large market clearly began to pose a threat to the British empire. The result for British politics was that 'patriotism', came to mean defence of the empire against the threat from Germany. It was impossible in this situation to be a patriot and at the same time support Hitler's fascism. The fascist movement in Britain, led by Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirts, foundered on the very rock on which it hoped to build.

It would be tempting, but misleading, to conclude that the BUF failed simply

because of the various objective conditions outlined above; this would be to overlook the role of political movements in making history. It is important to recognise that whereas Germany and Italy had to turn to fascism to bring in state intervention in the economy, very similar state planning was achieved in the USA (Roosevelt's New Deal) and Britain after the war



*A Fascist child responds*

without such dramatic measures. At the same time, we mustn't forget the clumsiness of the BUF or, most important of all, the opposition of the working class, to which we now turn.

## The Role of the Working Class

We have explained why, in Germany and Italy, given the economic and political situation, fascism was the only possibility of restructuring the economy *for the continuation of capitalist production*. Was then the victory of fascism inevitable in these two countries? In both Italy and Germany one essential condition for the victory of fascism was the political defeat of the working class. For the working class too has a solution to the crisis of capitalism — *SOCIALISM*. And it was very much the revolutionary attempts to overthrow capitalism that scared the bourgeoisie so much that they were willing to surrender at least a significant part of their political power to support the fascists in destroying this threat.

### Italy

In Italy at the end of the war the militancy of the working class increased

to reach its revolutionary peak of 1920. A series of strikes by the metal-workers, particularly in the Fiat works in Turin, spread throughout the northern centres. When the owners of a Milan car factory threatened a lockout the workers retaliated by occupying the factory. This spread to other centres and at its peak 500 large enterprises, including the most important ones, were under the control of the workers councils.

Although the working class had considerable power in its hands, neither the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) nor the Italian Communist Party (PCI) understood the need to seize state power. A few intellectuals, particularly Gramsci, did have this understanding. In May 1919 he wrote

*'The present phase of the class struggle in Italy is the phase that precedes either*

*the conquest of political power by the revolutionary proletariat . . . or a tremendous reaction by the capitalists and the governing caste.'* With no clear political way forward the factory occupations ended when the employers conceded many of the demands of the workers. The result was a decline in the political power of the working class and an inability to respond to the fascist threat.

### Germany

In Germany the working class had achieved considerable power after the first world war and this was expressed in workers councils. However because the councils were dominated by highly skilled workers their aims were concerned with their function as *producers* only and they distrusted 'politics'. On top of this, the

ability of the Nazis to offer an apparent sexual and social security (see later) and through public works such as the autobahns, jobs for the unemployed (Keynes, the economist-planner, had much praise for the Nazis), made it difficult for the working class parties to make much headway. This was not helped by antics of the two main parties - the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the German Communist Party (KPD).

The SPD believed in the parliamentary road to socialism and had participated in governing the Weimar Republic since the end of the war. It believed in legality at all costs. Even when it was clear that the Nazis didn't give a damn about the constitution, even when it was clear that the Nazis would destroy the working class organisations, the SPD leadership did everything within its power to hold back the rank and file followers from mounting effective opposition on the streets. 'Don't provoke the Nazis', they said, 'leave it to the government'. At the same time the ruling class, through the government, was turning a blind eye to the illegal activities of the Nazis and their actions were preparing the ground for a Nazi takeover.

And when the government itself broke the constitution in taking over the SDP-controlled Prussian government by a coup d'état, the SPD did nothing.

Under these circumstances the KPD were in a position to appeal to the rank and file followers of the SPD for working class unity against the Nazis. Their failure to do so was a result of the disastrous policies of the Comintern. By 1929 the various national communist parties were completely subordinate to the Stalinist leadership in Russia. The theory of 'social fascism' initially put forward by Stalin in 1924 had become the official dogma of the Comintern. According to this theory, social democracy was the major force propping up the Weimar Republic and was thus 'objectively' the 'moderate' wing of fascism which was the combat organisation of the bourgeoisie. The major enemy was therefore not the Nazis but the SPD. Rather than regarding the rank and file followers of the SPD as working class militants with illusions in social democracy and appealing for unity on a class basis, they were regarded as 'the most reactionary and backward part of the working class...'. Rather than fight for unity in the factories on a class

basis the KPD set up their own union in opposition to that controlled by the SPD. The results were disastrous.

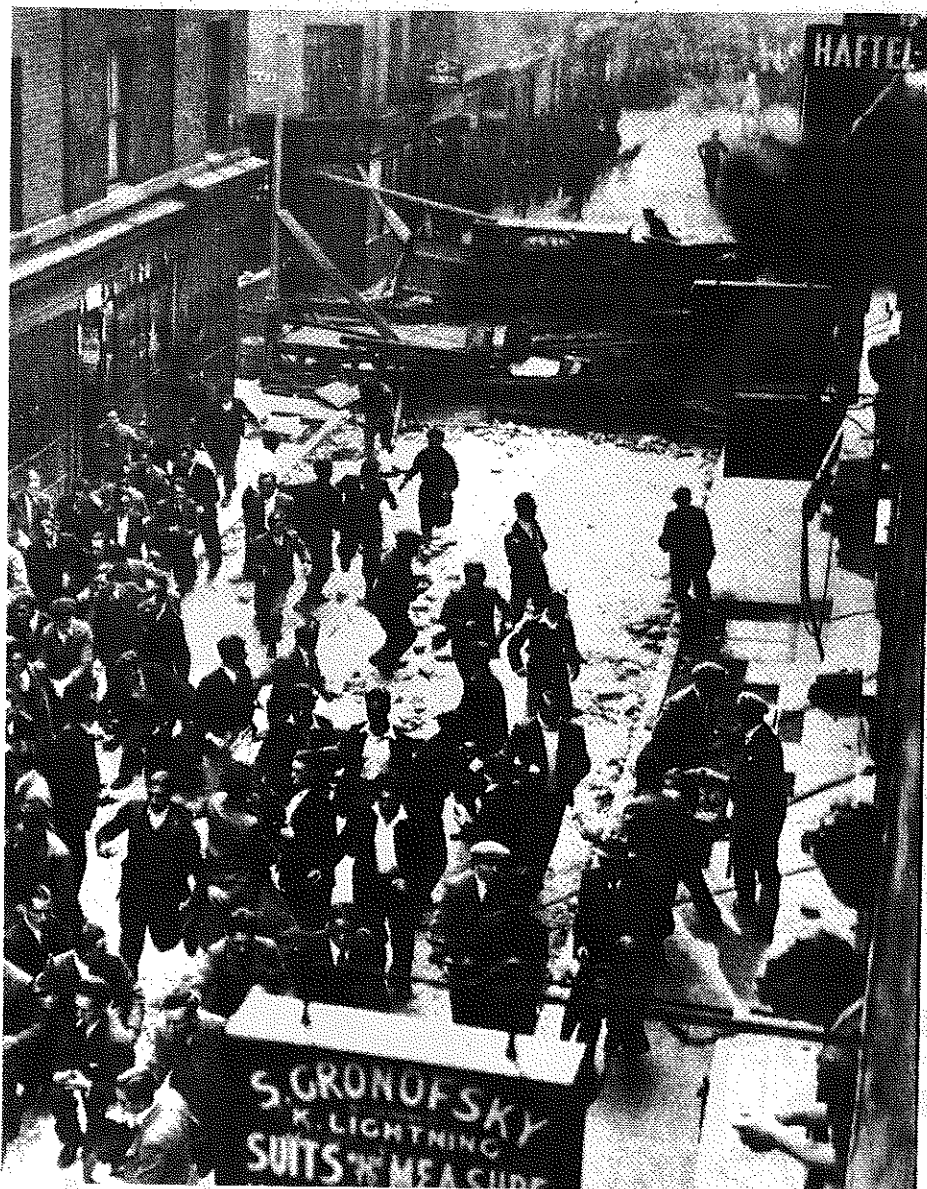
Divisions within the working class were strengthened, the influence of the KPD in the factories diminished and the working class as a whole was weakened. This policy reached its ludicrous extreme in July 1931 over a referendum. Initially the KPD had gone against its policy of only joining a 'united front from below' and called on the SPD to join with them. When the SPD leadership refused the KPD stood on its head and united with the Nazis in attempting to oust the SPD government from Prussia.

The result of the policies of the SPD and KPD was only to add to the political and organisational confusion of the working class. Effective working class resistance to the Nazi take-over became impossible. A political defeat led to a physical extermination.

### Britain

The most famous anti-BUF mobilisation occurred at Cable Street in London's East End on 4th October 1936. Although this didn't stop the BUF finally and there were many other important actions around this period, we can look at what happened up to October 4th to see the forces behind anti-fascism at that time. The major working class organisation was the Labour Party. Its response to the growth of the BUF was similar to the way the SPD responded to the fascists in Germany. The initial response in language similar to today was, 'ignore them and they'll go away'. This changed after the BUF's anti-semitic campaign in the East End to another policy, equally familiar today, of calling on a supposedly neutral state to ban their demonstrations and paramilitary organisations.

Compared to Italy and Germany, the British Communist Party was very small. By the time the BUF appeared on the scene the Comintern had dropped its 'social fascism' policy and was in favour of the 'Popular Front'. The various national communist parties were to attempt to bring the official trade union and social democratic parties into joint activity and pronouncements against the fascist parties. Some Labour Party members did work with the Communist Party but, as Joe Jacobs points out in *Out of the Ghetto*, it was the rank and file, including many non-party members who led the way. Considerable efforts had to be put in to get the CP leadership to drop a planned march in solidarity with the Spanish Republican Movement for that particular day and much of the work to mobilise people for the East End march was done without guidance or official support. As it turned out, hundreds of thousands marched and took up the slogan of the Spanish Republic 'They shall not pass' and stopped Mosley from marching.



Battle of Cable Street

# Fascist Ideology

Fascism does not appear suddenly out of nowhere, neither are its ideas and beliefs absurdities far different from those in the heads of 'ordinary' people. Many of the ideas are prejudices common in bourgeois society taken one step further. Thus 'we'll always need leaders' becomes unquestioning loyalty to the Fuhrer; 'a woman's place is in the home' leads to women being regarded as breeding machines to provide the nation with soldiers.

Fascist ideology is therefore a thoroughly bourgeois ideology which does not challenge the capitalist system. However, there are contradictions within this ideology which led many to support it in the sincere belief that it was a radical challenge to the status quo. Many fascists, for example, believed that the socialism in National Socialism was for real and believed they were building a party to smash the bosses. In this section we therefore intend to look more closely at various aspects of fascist ideology in order to gain a better understanding of its mass appeal.

## The Socialism in National Socialism

Fascist organisations both in the past and present have attacked the capitalist system in outspoken terms. The odd paragraph in *National Front News* would not be out of place in the papers of the revolutionary left. The question then is whether these attacks on the capitalist system are genuine, or just a 'con-trick' to attempt to win support amongst the working class.

What we have to understand is that this anti-capitalist propaganda of the fascists is based on a misunderstanding of what happens at the heart of capitalist production. According to the fascists there are two types of capital — Industrial Capital (or Productive Capital) and Finance Capital. In the former the workers and capitalists jointly produce commodities and justly share the rewards — profits for the bosses, wages for the workers.

Along comes the moneylender (Finance Capital) demanding a share of the bosses' profits on the money in the form of interest on the money loaned to the capitalist. Unlike the boss, who has been productive, the moneylender did nothing, he is a parasite and hence deserves nothing.

In the real world of capitalism this division between Finance Capital and Industrial Capital is not so clear cut. All the wealth is produced by the labour of the workers in transforming the raw materials of production into the finished commodity. That part of the wealth produced by the workers for which they are not paid is divided up between the boss and moneylender. They are both parasites, and in the real world very often the same person or the same corporation.

The point about the theory is that it had enormous *political* implications for

the German Nazis. Firstly, it enabled the NSDAP to win the support of anti-capitalist workers without at the same time antagonising the bosses. Secondly the real class struggle between workers and capitalists could be obscured under the smokescreen of a mythical battle of labour and industrial capital against 'Jewish' usury. Thirdly it supported the Nazis' racial theory — not only could anti-semitism be justified in racial terms, but also in terms of the allegedly parasitic role Jews played in the economy as financiers.

## Other Strands in Fascist Ideology

Fascism is not just a theory of race allied to a theory of capitalist society. It is a theory of social and personal relations with strong ties to authoritarianism and patriarchal forms of social organisation. The authoritarian tradition in German political thought had been dominant since the failure of the bourgeois revolution in 1848. The failure to establish the bourgeois rights and beliefs of the French revolution — a free press, representative government, freedom for political parties etc. — meant the continuation of the reactionary and authoritarian philosophy of the Junkers, the landed aristocracy.

The NSDAP also incorporated into its programme elements of the 'Petty Bourgeois Socialism' of the nineteenth century. Under threat from the development of large scale industry, this movement advocated a return to a pre-capitalist mode of production and the old property relations which went along with them — guilds in manufacture and patriarchal relations in agriculture. These, in fact, became the demands of the Nazi 'Guild Socialists' and inspired the corporations of the Third Reich. The main importance of this item of political programme was its contribution to swinging the petty bourgeoisie behind the Nazi party. Their attention was eagerly directed to the alleged fact that all the large retail stores were in the hands of the Jews, and that this spelt ruin for the small shopkeeper. Thus the anti-semitism of the NSDAP could provide the link between the separate items of their programme and the consciousness of the petty bourgeoisie.

## Anti-semitism

Early Christian doctrine forbade its followers from engaging in moneylending for gain, so that this function — called 'usury' — fell to the Jews since they were the only sizeable non-Christian minority





in Europe. The earliest attacks on usury were anti-capitalist, but, because of the Christian doctrine, tended to be couched in religious terms. Christianity, and this was especially true in Germany at the time of the Protestant Reformation, was therefore the greatest persecutor of the Jews.

From the sixteenth century on, anti-semitism became what has been called 'an entire system of religious, political, social, cultural and economic illusion which penetrated into the very marrow of the bones of the German artisan and peasant classes. And because of his role as usurer, as mediating the process of ruin of these classes, the Jew became identified in the petty bourgeois consciousness with social change and the various philosophical and political ideas and institutions which facilitated the breakup of the guild and patriarchal order — democracy, liberalism, republicanism, rationalism, materialism, free trade, capitalism, socialism and revolution' (Robert Black, *Fascism in Germany*). Thus the moneylender appeared as enemy number one to the German peasant, and in so far as he was more often than not Jewish, the equation Jew equals parasite was not difficult for the Nazis to put across successfully.

The threatened world of the German petty bourgeoisie was haunted by the twin spectres of capitalism and socialism, between which its own power was being squeezed. Rather than knowingly take sides with either of these classes against the other, the petty bourgeoisie was more readily wooed by Nazi demogogy which placed them both in cahoots against the poor shopkeeper and peasant. The linking factor was anti-semitism: 'While Moses Kohn sits in the directors meeting, advocating a policy of firmness', said Hitler, 'his brother, Isaac Cohen, stands in the factory yard stirring up the masses.'

During the latter part of the nineteenth century the so-called science of race had been developing. Writers such as Count Arthur de Gobineau, the 'father of modern racism', and Houston Stewart Chamberlain developed the theory that the 'racial question' was the most important problem in history. This was taken over by the fascists, who saw history as the history of the *racial* struggle and opposed to the Marxist view that history is the history of the *class* struggle.

For the German Nazis, the supreme race was the Aryan race and its basis was the German middle classes, those hit most severely during the economic crisis. The whole thing, according to the Nazis, was a 'Jewish Conspiracy of World Government'. The Jews were deliberately sabotaging the economic base of the Aryan civilisation and at the same time weakening the 'purity of the race.'

'It was and is the Jews who bring the negroes into the Rhineland, always with the same secret thought of their own of ruining the hated white race by the necessarily resulting bastardisation... to deprive the white race of the foundations for a sovereign existence through infection

from lower humanity' — Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. (Note that the National Front are careful to blame others — the 'liberals' etc. — for 'bringing in the blacks'.)

This theory was based to a large extent on the 'Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion', which was claimed by anti-semites to be the authentic minutes of a series of meetings of Jewish leaders in which they planned the overthrow of the world. Needless to say, it has been clearly demonstrated that the document was a forgery of the Tsarist secret police in the early years of this century, but it continues to turn up in fascist literature to this day as 'proof' of the 'Jewish conspiracy'.

#### Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour

'Marriages between Jews and nationals of German or similar blood are forbidden.'  
'Jews are forbidden to hoist the Reich and national flags, and to show the Reich colours. They are on the other hand allowed to show the Jewish colours.'

In the eyes of the NSDAP this threat to the Aryan race had to be removed, and the basis laid for the 'final solution'. As early as 1919, Hitler pointed out that 'Rational anti-semitism's... final objective must unswervingly be the removal of the Jews altogether' (our emphasis). It is clear therefore that the Nazis' attempts to liquidate the Jewish people altogether in the gas chambers of Belsen, Dachau and Auschwitz was not some insane *diversion* from the true nature of fascism, but a logical result of everything the Nazis stood for, and always had stood for.

#### The Problem of Understanding Fascism

One of the weaknesses of the anti-fascists of the thirties was their lack of understanding of what they were up against. In general, attempts to explain it were exclusively on the basis of nineteenth century Marxist political economy. Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian Marxist, attempted to go beyond this by looking at the appeal of fascism at a psychological level.

He argued that the German Nazis gained mass support because most people are brought up to fear freedom, have little confidence in themselves, and feel the need for strong leaders. This is doubtless true, but what is controversial about Reich is that he put most of these feelings down to the suppression of childhood sexuality by the authoritarian family.

Now, while we don't accept that a psychological analysis of fascism provides a full explanation, we also reject the 'World Fascist Disease Breeds on Crisis and is Aimed Only at Smashing the Trade Unions' 'theories' of some crude Trotskyists. We firmly believe that Marxists must learn from a feminist understanding of sexuality, sexism and the family and so be able to begin to appreciate the basis of fascism's appeal. That is why in the following pages we complete our picture of fascist ideology by looking at what the insights of sexual politics can teach us about it.



Nazi racist beer-mat: 'He who buys from a Jew is a traitor to his people'

#### Reich on Fascism

Reich said that the results of parents discouraging any form of sexuality in children is that the child grows up feeling 'guilty', afraid, shy, fearful of authority, obedient, 'good' and docile. This leads in turn to a fear of freedom, to a conflict within the person between instinct and morality which the latter usually wins. Suppression of childhood sexuality is the result of the authoritarian family, said Reich, and this type of family was most often to be found in the petty bourgeoisie. Thus the petty bourgeoisie are predisposed to accept authoritarian regimes and whims of dictators. Reich also suggested that the reason for a significant number of working class people turning to the Nazis was a consequence of them imitating middle class lifestyles. 'The lower middle class bedroom suite, which the rabble buys as soon as it has the means even if he is otherwise revolutionary minded; the consequent suppression of the wife, even if he is a communist; the 'decent' suit of clothes for Sunday, 'proper' dance steps etc. have an incomparably greater reactionary influence when repeated day after day than thousands of revolutionary rallies and leaflets can ever hope to counter'. Therefore, said Reich, socialists and anti-fascists should cultivate the budding revolutionary lifestyles rather than producing more and more doses of 'propaganda against hunger'.

#### Women in Nazi Germany

Whether we agree or not with some of the links made by Reich is less important than the fact that the sexual politics of fascism was ignored by the majority of its opponents despite its being crucial to the type of society the fascists wanted to create.

Firstly, the German Nazis (as the National Front today) attacked sexual permissiveness, the 'loosening of moral standards' after the war. Along with the rapid industrialisation, it threatened the breakup of the peasant family, the very backbone of the state and its security. This propaganda also gained them the support of the traditionally conservative middle classes and sections of the church. It should be emphasised however, that morality was always secondary to the

needs of the nation and the race. When they first came to power their desire to strengthen the family to increase the population was their main goal, whereas in the later 30s they supported the production of children in any circumstances; in or out of wedlock, it didn't matter.

Secondly, they had to control women's actions and choices if they were to implement their racial policies. Thirdly, women were crucial to their desire to boost the population, thus strengthening the capacity of the nation to wage aggressive imperialistic war.

While schemes to loan money at low rates of interest to women if they married; paid maternity leave and family allowances were intended to strengthen the traditional role of women thereby cutting down their choices, they were addressed to the real needs of women for financial help. As well as those financial incentives, fascism was able to gain support from women through the way it drew on and extended the patriarchal culture that already existed. In its glorification of motherhood it offered a secure role for women where everyday subservience to men and the state was to be looked on as an honour.

Life for those women who continued to reject their traditional role was very difficult. Contraceptive and abortion facilities were removed, although once again these policies were subordinate to the precious racial policies of the Nazis — abortions were freely available to those with 'birth defects', and for non-Aryan women. Despite the mystical propaganda about 'the dignity of motherhood', women were first and foremost breeders of 'racially healthy stock', and women who attempted to be or do anything else were persecuted and, in the case of women having abortions, actually shot.

In institutionalising women's oppression in this way, the Nazis were working in tandem with, and not against, prevailing ideas of 'a woman's place'. We need to remember this; supporting women's liberation is not a diversion from the anti-fascist struggle, it is a central part of it. The same can be said for those movements which challenge the traditional role and image of men.

### Masculinism and Fascism

The Nazi wish to foster a 'Master Race' not only led to tight control over women, but in a different way, over men too: true Aryan men had to be soldiers and brothers in combat and fathers to the race.

It was difficult to live up to the usual standards of manliness in Germany after the First World War. Defeat in the war, the scarcity of jobs, the breakdown of traditional values of respect for authority, belief in the family and the virtue of patriotism shattered their ideals of manhood. For those who had fought in the trenches it was worse; they slunk around the beerhalls in self-pity. Goering called them 'fighters who could not brutalise themselves'.

Male companionship in the brutal conditions of the trenches had a

profound effect on this generation — they came to place overriding importance on this all-male companionship. A set of ideas that had developed in the pre-war youth movement made a lot of sense to them — **MASCULINISM**. This means thinking that men are great and women are to be despised. Stefan George — an influential philosopher in Germany at the time — for example, advocated the *Bund* (Communion of Men), praising masculine prowess, purity and perfection. He believed in a circle of men, led to a beautiful future by the Fuhrer. Another writer, Bluher, held that humanity had failed to maintain itself on a 'heroic' level because men had allowed themselves to succumb to the 'female' virtues of human kindness, sympathy and charity. Bluher saw male love as the 'unique force for creating the state and its Fuhrer; it should not be debased and squandered on the family'.

Embittered ex-soldiers plus masculinist ideas had a profound effect on the early Nazi party, despite the fact that some of them contradicted other aspects of fascist ideology. The Nazis said 'It is our belief that it is the very masculinity of National Socialism which will most ultimately appeal to every genuine woman, for only this will enable her to become a full woman once more'.

Hitler built up a paramilitary movement from a small nucleus of ex-servicemen into a vast organisation of several millions partly because he was able to offer the impoverished middle class man and later the unemployed a chance to retrieve their lost masculine self-respect. They got a free uniform and entry into a strong and powerful brotherhood — the Brownshirts. It was they who brawled the way along the road to power.

The SA also provided a refuge for many homosexuals attacked by society in the 1920s. However, this 'by-product' of

masculinism was allowed only so long as the Nazis needed it. After taking power, the axe came down on homosexuals too. It started with the 'Night of the long Knives' and the Blood Purge, and ended with the murder of half-a-million homosexuals in the gas chambers. Hitler used the Blood Purge, when Rohm (homosexual leader of the SA) and Strasser (leader of the working class radicals in the Nazi party) and others were murdered, to purge the Nazi party of all those who supported a 'Second Revolution against Big Business', 'to reassure the army that the SA wasn't getting too strong, and to mark the end of a period when a brotherhood would be used to brawl the Nazis to power. It was the beginning of the period when motherhood was glorified, and was justified as an action by the Party of Decency dealing with 'notorious homosexual perverts'.

Understanding fascist sexual politics is vital if we are to fight fascism. As fascist ideas are little but extensions of bourgeois ideology it follows that fighting those ideas is fighting fascism and is depriving it of the echo it finds in the nationalism, authoritarianism, racism, anti-semitism and sexism prevalent in capitalist societies. We cannot draw a line which separates the struggle against fascism from the struggle against capitalism because they are the same struggle. If we try to draw that line by calling the fight against sexism a diversion, in so doing we weaken our ability to fight the fascists. The attitude we must avoid was very clearly expressed by a woman doctor in the German Communist Party who denounced Reich saying: 'How can you expect us to believe that we, workers' daughters, have a sexual problem? Your theory casts disgrace on the proletariat, sexual problems belong to the bourgeoisie'.

